

GURU NANAK
AND
ORIGINS OF THE SIKH FAITH

HARBANS SINGH

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ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਆ ਮਿਟੀ ਹੁੰਦੁ ਜਗਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਆ ॥
ਜਿਉ ਕਰ ਸੂਰਜ ਨਿਕਲਿਆ ਤਾਰੇ ਛਪੇ ਅੰਧੇਰ ਪਲੋਆ ॥
ਸਿੰਘ ਬੁਕੇ ਮ੍ਰਿਗਾਵਲੀ ਭੰਨੀ ਜਾਇ ਨਾ ਧੀਰ ਧਰੋਆ ॥
ਜਿਥੈ ਬਾਬਾ ਪੈਰ ਧਰੇ ਪੂਜਾ ਆਸਣ ਥਾਪਣ ਸੋਆ ॥
ਸਿਧ ਆਸਣ ਸਭ ਜਗਤ ਦੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਆਦਿ ਮਤੇ ਜੇ ਕੋਆ ॥
ਘਰ ਘਰ ਅੰਦਰ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ ਹੋਵੇ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਸੋਆ ॥
ਬਾਬੇ ਤਾਰੇ ਚਾਰ ਚਕ, ਨੌ ਖੰਡ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਦੋਆ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋਆ ॥

— ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ (A. D. 1551-1639)

FOREWORD

DURING the tercentenary year of Guru Gobind Singh's birth, the Punjabi University, in collaboration with the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, undertook an extensive programme of publications. One of the important books published on the occasion was a biography of Guru Gobind Singh by Sardar Harbans Singh. This was originally written in English and was translated into all the major Indian languages. Its Sanskrit version, in verse, produced by Dr Satya Vrata, was given the Sahitya Akademy award.

The Senate of the University, while considering proposals for scholarly works to be brought out in commemoration of the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, decided to publish a biography of Guru Nanak. The work was entrusted to Sardar Harbans Singh. For him it meant the relinquishing of his charge as Registrar of this University. He, in all humility, gave up the office and took over the new assignment. He has been at this work for more than two years and I know with what single-minded devotion he has pursued the subject. I am glad that with Satguru's grace we have been able to keep the time-schedule for the publication.

In writing this book, Sardar Harbans Singh has made use of all the available primary and secondary sources on Guru Nanak, such as various versions of the Janamsakhis, *Mahima Prakash*, *Suraj Prakash* and other relevant material in Punjabi and Persian. The task was, indeed, a difficult one, especially because of the inadequacy of the material. The Sikh traditional and religious literature has not been exposed hitherto to historical criticism, so it is not easy to sift what is authentic from what is not. The problem is posed in its most intractable form when dealing with

the life of Guru Nanak. Sardar Harbans Singh is conscious of it. Yet he has tackled it with resourcefulness and succeeded in producing a lucid and reliable account. His analysis of the historical situation at the time of the Guru's birth and of the impact he made on the religious and social life of the people is perceptive.

Here I would also like to mention that the Punjabi University received in 1968 an invitation from the Harvard Center of World Religions for Sardar Harbans Singh to visit there for a year. I must acknowledge the help given in this behalf by Dr Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Director of the Center, and the facilities afforded to Sardar Harbans Singh by the Center in completing his work.

The University is also bringing out Punjabi and Hindi versions of this biography. These are under preparation and will be out shortly.

Punjabi University
Patiala
October 19, 1969

KIRPAL SINGH NARANG
Vice-Chancellor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS Life of Guru Nanak was commissioned by the Punjabi University, Patiala, for the quinquecentennial of the Guru's birth falling during the current year. To the Vice-Chancellor, Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, I owe gratitude for his personal trust in me and for his continued interest and help in the project. I was also fortunate in having the opportunity of spending during the course of this work a year at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University. This was a stimulating experience and relevant, in more ways than one, to my study. I must acknowledge especially my indebtedness to Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Director of the Center and Professor of World Religions, from whom I received throughout my stay immense courtesy and encouragement. Apart from his deeply human and tolerant point of view, he has by his perceptively formulated and humbly, yet pressingly, stated approach to the study of religion, introduced new elements in the intellectual culture of the age. To have spent some time near him was both enriching and inspiring. Gratitude is also due to Dr John B. Carman, Assistant Director of the Center, for his close reading of the manuscript and valuable comments. I owe a great deal to the scholarly advice of Professor Donald G. Dawe, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond (Virginia), and render him my warmest obligation. Dr Rollin S. Armour of Stetson University, De Land (Florida), read a few of the chapters and made useful suggestions. By his manifold help in supplying books and manuscripts from his private collection and solving many difficult problems I referred to him for comment and clarification, Dr Ganda Singh has contributed more to the book than can be acknowledged. I had similarly the advantage of access to the

library of the eminent Punjabi philosopher and savant Dr Balbir Singh and take this opportunity of extending to him my grateful thanks. Mention must be made of the help received from Dr Jhinasi Tekin, Lecturer on Turkish, Harvard University, and Dr Daud Rahbar, Professor of World Religions, Boston University, who deciphered and translated into English the text of the Turkish inscription in Baghdad. Shri Prabh Dayal provided valuable secretarial assistance until he left to take on a lecturer's position in a college. The gap was filled by Shri Jaswant Singh. Both deserve my warmest appreciation. Tasneema Khatoon Ghazi and Patricia Sanford helped with typing and I express my gratefulness to them for their patient and ungrudging cooperation. And, finally, I am indebted to the Danforth Foundation who gave a grant enabling me to be at the Center for the Study of World Religions for nearly a year.

Translations of quotations from the Guru Granth are by the author. The textual citation is from the *Shabadarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

*Center for the Study of World Religions
Harvard University, Cambridge
August 17, 1969*

HARBANS SINGH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

EVIDENCE about Guru Nanak initially seems abundant and easy to reach. The factual traits of his person are well established. In point of time, he is closer than any other of the great religious teachers of the world. His era is no more remote than five centuries ago: the current year, in fact, marks the quincentenary of his birth. He thus lived and preached in the full view of history. The ministry which began with him was borne on by his nine successors. This brought his name and teaching in continuum to the beginning of the eighteenth century, i.e., till 1708, when the tenth and last *Guru*, or prophet-teacher, Gobind Singh, died ending the line of personal witnesses and bestowing the inheritance on the holy book, the *Guru Granth*. His followers, called Sikhs, from Sanskrit *shishya*, meaning disciple, cherish the immediacy of his presence with a rare faith and fidelity. In the psyche and consciousness of the people of north India as a whole, the image lovingly abides of that "gentle and most peaceable" of prophets. Song and story celebrate him. Legend abounds. His poetry has come down to us as spoken by him, with its characteristic symbolism and imagery coined in the depths of his soul and its metres and harmonies modulated upon his lips. More than 900 of his *shabads*, or hymns, are in the Scripture.

It is possible to go to Talwandi, now Nankana Sahib, where he was born and find families who trace their ancestry

back to his time. In that town one can see the places where he had his school-lessons or where he took shelter to avoid meeting an angry father after what was considered to be one of his wasteful adventures. Villages and towns all over India preserve traditions recounting his visits during his extensive travels. His direct lineal descendants are with us, some of them well known for the positions they occupy in the different sectors of Indian life. Written materials, if not copious, are in fair supply. Life-stories began to be compiled soon after the Guru's passing away and have since multiplied. Yet for anyone proceeding to make a critical study of his life this testimony will remain inadequate.

His religious verse bears witness to the nature of God and man's duty, not to himself. One would look in vain in it for references to any contemporary events or personal experiences in which his convictions were formed. This would be contrary to the very nature of his commission. "As the Lord sends His word so do I deliver it," he had said. He was a Guru, a teacher through whom light and truth were transmitted to man. His poetry was made for this purpose. Concern with the Divine, the Ultimate Reality, and the realization of human destiny in relation to it is the theme of the entire body of Sikh Scriptural texts which contains not only Guru Nanak's compositions, but also the works of five of the other Gurus and some of the Hindu and Muslim saints of medieval India. Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru (1581-1606), who compiled the canon, applied rigorous standards and took only such of the hymns of the saints as were in accord with the Gurus' in their spiritual tone and meaning. He forbore to include the compositions of Bhai Gurdas, one of his most learned and much revered contemporaries, who transcribed the first copy of the book. The religious motive of this verse was immaculate and for this reason the Guru designated it as the key to the

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Scripture. But, because some of it contained references to the Gurus and to certain details of their lives, it was denied Scriptural status.

The first accounts written of Guru Nanak are known as *Janamsakhis*, or birth-stories. The *genre* which gained vogue towards the end of the sixteenth century, or in the beginning of the seventeenth, has some peculiar characteristics. The *Janamsakhis* are written in Punjabi and represent the earliest extant models of prose in the language. The script is Gurmukhi, an alphabet which was refined and used by Guru Nanak for his own hymns. The form is episodic and the accounts are made up of a series of short disjointed narratives. The texts are generally anonymous. Out of the four distinctly categorized *Janamsakhi* cycles the authorship of only one is known beyond doubt. All of them relate to Guru Nanak and none to the later Gurus who, as successors to his spiritual commission, were entitled to, and in fact received, equal reverence. The *Janamsakhi* accounts tell their story in the language of myth and legend. There is no attempt at chronology. Even place-names are left vague or, in many cases, not mentioned at all. The incidents are sometimes incipient and seem to have been devised to illustrate and exemplify some of Guru Nanak's sayings. The pious embellishment takes stronger hold as time passes and the legendary and the miraculous preponderate in the later versions. The style tends to become more elaborate and the narratives wilt under the weight of loose detail. Some of the stories in the earliest *Janamsakhis* from which the subsequent variations seem to have sprung are, by comparison, more crisp and dramatic, with a striking economy of style. The *Janamsakhis* have also suffered by interpolations, the copyists' allowable margin of error as well as their arbitrary innovation, and deliberate distortion by schismatic and heretical sects. Many diverse versions

are in circulation, more of them in old manuscripts than in printed copy.

There is no older source on the life of Guru Nanak traced so far than the oldest available Janamsakhi. It is doubtful if any exist. From the investigations of historians and researchers and from the pursuit of the subject by the present author, it may not be entirely illegitimate to say that the chances of a major discovery are remote. In the first place, those times were generally disturbed and did not favour any sustained literary enterprise. It was especially true of the Punjab which had been in turmoil owing to frontier invasions and warfare. Secondly, historiography had never acquired any considerable indigenous currency. The art was, however, not unknown to the Muslim ruling race and had in their hands manifested itself in some distinguished and enduring models. But these were, commonly, the annals of kings and their courts and, less frequently, the accounts of travellers or life-stories of Sufi ascetics. Contemporary with Guru Nanak was Babar's *Tuzuk*, or Memoirs, a work of high literary genius. The Sikh tradition strongly subscribes to a meeting between the Guru and the Mughal Emperor. Babar gives in his book many interesting details of the campaigns and events he was involved in. He also describes the Indian life and customs and writes minutely even of such small matters as the people's style of eating their mangoes and drawing water from their wells. There is, however, no mention in these recollections that he met Guru Nanak. This will not be sufficient reason for rejecting altogether the possibility of such a meeting having taken place, though it does underline the fact that a persistent tradition about the Guru fails to elicit support from a likely contemporary source.

The earliest-known account of Guru Nanak in a non-Sikh source came a century after him. It was in *Dabistan-i-*

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Mazahib,¹ a remarkable and rare book, in Persian, on the religions and manners of the different races. The work is by Mobid Zulfiqar Ardestani, a Parsi scholar and traveller. He writes of the Sikhs under the title "Nanak Panthian," i.e., the Followers of Nanak's Path. His description of their faith is sketchy, but discerning. He noticed some of the individual features the new order had developed and the influence the memory of Guru Nanak exercised. He appreciated the Sikh belief about how his spirit was transmitted to his successors from one generation to the next and how they were not to be distinguished apart from him. The treatment of the later Gurus in *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* is more historical: that of the first more in the Janamsakhi tradition which indicates how influential and pervasive this *motif* had become in depicting Guru Nanak.² Similarly, the accounts of the Guru in any of the later Persian works such as *Khulasat-tu-Twarikh*³ by Sujan Rai Bhandari,

¹The manuscript, popularly ascribed to Muhsin Fani, was brought to light by Sir William Jones (1746-94), the founder of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta. On his recommendation, Francis Gladwin, a member of the Society, translated into English the first chapter of the book under the title "School of Manners." A full translation, by David Shea and Anthony Troyer, was published in London in 1843. It was reprinted in America in 1901 with a special Introduction by William Jackson, Professor of Indo-Iranian Languages at Columbia University. An English translation of the chapter on the Sikhs was made by Umrao Singh Majithia and published in the *Khalsa Review* of Lahore, June 1930. Still another translation of this section, with elaborate annotation, was published by Ganda Singh in the *Journal of Indian History*, August 1940, and repeated in the *Panjab Past and Present* (Punjabi University, Patiala), April 1967.

²For his brief and rather disjointed account of Guru Nanak, the author seems to have relied on stories that were orally current among the faithful rather than on any written texts. Two of the stories he narrates or alludes to are not in any of the known Janamsakhis. One of these is about the Guru's appearance in the previous traditional time-cycles, the Satyuga and the Treta, and the other about the innocent woman. This is symbolic of the Guru Nanak legend growing at that time inside the guilt-frame of piety.

³Written in 1698. The portion relating to the Sikhs was translated into Punjabi

*Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*⁴ by Ghulam Husain Khan, *Twarikh-i-Sikhan*⁵ by Khushwaqt Rai, *Zikr-i-Guruan wa Ibtida-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-Eshan*⁶ by Ahmad Shah Batalia and *Twarikh-i-Punjab*⁷ by Bute Shah add little to the outline of his life derivable from the Janamsakhis. Ghulam Husain Khan specifically mentions the name of a Muslim scholar and dervish, Syed Hasan, as Guru Nanak's teacher during his boyhood at Talwandi. This is one new point of fact which emerges, but it is traceable to no antecedent source. An unusual and, in most part, unrecognizable account of Guru Nanak came to be written in Marathi. It appeared in *Bhaktalilamrit*⁸ written in 1774 by Mahipati. Nothing in this narrative coincides with the known facts of Guru Nanak's life or his teaching except that a reference is made to his visit to Mecca and the name is mentioned of Mardana who accompanied him on most of his travels. Yet this account which stands totally outside the generally accepted literary and historical view of Guru Nanak conveys, through the metaphor of the Guru building temples for the Hindus and mosques for the Muslims, the universal quality of his message.

The Sikh learning itself was depressed by a series of crises. In 1705, when Guru Gobind Singh had to evacuate

by Ganda Singh and published in the *Phulwari* of Lahore, October 1931.

⁴Written in 1780. The entire manuscript was translated into English by a Frenchman named M. Raymond, calling himself Haji Mustafa, and published in 1789. A part of it was translated by John Briggs and published in London in 1832.

⁵Written in 1811 for Colonel David Ochterlony of the East India Company troops by the Company's official news-writer.

⁶This section on the Sikhs is from a larger manuscript *Twarikh-i-Hind* written in 1818.

⁷Written in 1848. This is a history of the Punjab from the earliest times to the disintegration of the Sikh empire.

⁸An English translation, made by Justin E. Abbott and N. R. Godbole, is available in *Nectar from Indian Saints* (pp. 180-195).

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Anandpur under pressure of a protracted siege by the Mughal troops, a large quantity of manuscript material was washed away with the baggage in the river Sirsa which he had to cross. This was mostly the creation of the fifty-two poets the Tenth Guru kept with him to make translations in the current tongue from ancient classics. Yet it was not unlikely that with this literature were swallowed in the Sirsa some prior documents accumulated over the years. Then, most of the eighteenth century which was a period of persecution and stress for the community marked one vast gap in Sikh letters. The destruction and loss of manuscripts and documents during this time would be beyond estimate. What came through unscathed was the Guru Granth—the Guru's own word. This was held dearer than anything else and the Sikhs carried copies of it during their exilic days to their desert haunts and preserved them through peril and tribulation at the cost of their lives.

The reason for this will perhaps eventually remain elusive, but the Janamsakhis are far and away the only means of information about the life of Guru Nanak. The canonical sources may be used to authenticate the perspective in terms of the Guru's own sayings and teaching; they will yield no empirical facts. The writings subsequent to the Janamsakhis may be illustrative of how his followers understood the Guru and his mission at a given time; they do not transcend the historical framework set by the latter. The local tradition obtaining at places sacred to his memory bears testimony to the forms of religious life that had their origins in Guru Nanak's work; it provides no definitive data. The printed tracts which visitors will have given them at the more important of the Gurdwaras, or Sikh shrines, present the events wrapped in the imagery of the Janamsakhis or of the latter-day epic *Nanak Prakash*, which, again, is based on them. The significance of the Janamsakhis in

capturing the image of Guru Nanak and mediating it to succeeding generations is evident. Manifest, simultaneously, is the fact that there is little besides these to go by in attempting a historical reconstruction of it.

How will the Janamsakhi material meet the requirements of critical techniques of modern historiography? These accounts were written by men of faith. They wrote for the faithful—of a theme which had grown into their lives through the years as a real, vivid truth. Straightforward history was not their concern, nor was their description objective and conceptual. Their thought-stream was more individual and they expressed themselves in graphic, representational terms and in the forms of drama and narrative. The life to which they responded in wonder and faith had a unique sanctity and meaning for them and was essentialized in the idiom of legend, myth and miracle. This was the form in which great spiritual figures had always been understood and realized. The style was widely current and quickly intelligible in the *milieu* in which Janamsakhis were composed. The Puranic legends and mythology had from the beginning exercised a strong hold on the Indian imagination. With the influx of the Muslims, miraculous stories about the life of the Prophet (*mu'jizat*, or evidentiary miracles) and about the saintly mystics (*karamat*, or miracles testifying to the veracity of a holy man) had become popular through Sufi dervishes and their followers. The first treatise on Sufism, in Persian, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, was written in the Punjab by the celebrated Muslim saint Al-Hujwiri in the 11th century. This work and such others as the *Tazkirat-ul-Awliya* by Farid-ud-Din Attar (b. 1119) contained biographies of the Sufi saints and told of the wonderful deeds they were believed to have performed. Many such stories came down to the people by word of mouth. Stories were also commonly accepted about the

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extraordinary feats of the ascetical yogis. The events of Guru Nanak's life remembered and reflected upon by successive generations of disciples were invested by inspired spirits and devout imaginations with figures and symbols current in that environment. The mythological, the traditional and the historical were mingled together to resurrect the meaning of past facts extracted from their terrestrial context. The time-and-space setting was considered unimportant. The Janamsakhi accounts thus became interpretations of events rather than literal and orderly transcriptions of them. This is best exemplified in the archetypal narratives as distinguished from the later accretions which lack creative finesse and are, in many instances, grossly garbled and exaggerated.

For the critical historian, the Janamsakhi materials will always pose severe problems. The application of modern methods of analysis will reduce their historical structure to the barest of outlines. This is not to undervalue the current criteria of historiography which have brought clarity and order to our knowledge of the past. Yet its search for facticity has at times been too narrowly pursued. Until recent times history was written as an amalgam of fact and meaning. An event was not viewed in atomistic isolation. It was seen as part of the total reality of the person. History was never simply a question of what a person did or said at a particular moment, but also was a question of what he became. The story, in the Janamsakhis, of Guru Nanak's religiously sophisticated acrostic written while he was still at school is not the report of an unbelievable event that did not happen. It is the report of a divinely gifted child who was to use his talents later to raise the deepest religious questions for mankind. The story is not merely saying that Nanak was a gifted child. It is also saying that he was to use his gifts in a specific way, i.e., as a great spiritual guide to

humanity. This latter assertion is not less important than the first. And the historian cannot overlook it. In the legend we are also dealing with history, but with history not arranged in the usual linear, chronological order.

In the Janamsakhis, conflict between father and son emerges at a number of points and is described in emphatic detail. If one were to follow the manner of contemporary psychological interpreters, speculations could be made about the way in which this conflict precipitated an identity crisis for the young Nanak which was basic to his spiritual vocation. Similarly, conjectures could be made about the "illness" during his boyhood at Talwandi representing the strain of his adolescent years and about the temptations by Kaliyug being the reflection of a passing inner struggle. But just as the Janamsakhi narratives do not obey the rules of modern historiography, they do not go in for psychological analysis.

The Janamsakhis also describe nature miracles in which Guru Nanak is either protected by usually destructive elements—as when the cobra shades him—or he is able to control natural forces. Such stories are found widely in the accounts of religious prophets of all races. It is easy to disregard them as merely the products of a pious, but overly active, imagination which replaces facts with fantasies. But to set these stories aside as of no historical value is to miss their real meaning. The Janamsakhi miracles—for example, the restoration of the destroyed grain fields—take on their historical meaning in the light of the spirit of religion as described by Guru Nanak. They are a pictorial expression of his faith in the power of spirit over nature and in the regenerative quality of divine grace working in relation to the affairs of his life, not simply in hope for otherworldly transformation. For Guru Nanak "the secret of religion lies in living in the world without being overcome

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by it.” The stopping of the huge rock by Guru Nanak upon his outstretched palm as it was hurled downhill towards him symbolizes inner certitude and fearless resistance to evil. Religion is to be found in mastery of oneself and of this world for the good of mankind, not simply in fleeing from it. The nature miracles are symbolic expressions of this conviction. The grace of God brings reconstruction in the affairs of this world as well as hope for immortality.

Some of the miracle stories of the Janamsakhis approach the character of parables. When Guru Nanak squeezes blood from the delicacies of the rich man and milk from the bread of a poor man, there is acted out his precept about the balance of morality between earning by honest labour and gain by exploitation. When he heals the son of a nobleman with crumbs of bread from the poor man’s home, he symbolically rejects the attempts of the man in authority to coerce God by his assembly of holy men. It is really a parable of God’s graciousness. The tendency now-a-days is to use such accounts for a study of Guru Nanak’s doctrine, not his life. These stories, symbolically acted out, inhere in the narratives of his life as witnesses to the essential unity of life and doctrine in the religion proclaimed by him. Being and knowledge cannot finally be separated. The historical impact of Guru Nanak was in the unique way in which he personally embodied the truths he taught. This was what the Muslim Shaikh at Panipat perceived when, after listening to him, he exclaimed, “What credentials do we require of him who witnesses God himself . . . Just to behold such a one is enough.” Guru Nanak’s message cannot be understood without an awareness of the essentially single-minded and integral quality of his life and teachings.

In this sense myth and legend become relevant data for recovering the life of a religious teacher of the past. Dates and events and other external facts are important, but they

do not provide the basis for understanding the true nature of his greatness and the impact he had on others. With the critic, it may be conceded that there are exaggerations in the Janamsakhis, but the underlying principle for these accounts was the remarkable quality of Guru Nanak's spiritual inspiration and genius—his divine intuition, compassion and wisdom. The details of many of the stories may not be literally true, but each one bears within it testimony to the depth and charity of Guru Nanak's life, which depth revealed to his followers the presence of God in him. This is the abiding truth underneath the Janamsakhi stories. The historicist's picture of Guru Nanak will remain essentially scanty and much short of the reality he was.

No account could take in fully a life as rich and profound as Guru Nanak's. For this reason a biography of him in any perfect sense of the word will never be written. This present one—a modest attempt towards realizing an image of the Guru—makes least claim to definitiveness. Its only justification perhaps is that it might render some needed service in the quincenary year of the Guru's birth when special attention will be devoted to the study of his life and doctrine. The sources mostly drawn upon are the Janamsakhis, supplemented occasionally by later works. No attempt has been made to rewrite the stories in the light of modern knowledge of science and psychology, nor to interpret them in terms derived from these fields. No attempt has likewise been made to rationalize away the miracles. The lives of prophets have been comprehended by their followers through such marvellous acts and they signify the quality of their extraordinary powers. The stories in the Janamsakhis can be read at different levels of meaning and the symbolism underlying them variously elaborated. But such an analysis is not the object of this book. The aim rather has been to construct from the details in different

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versions of the Janamsakhis and in some of the later sources a positive picture of the Guru's deeds and preachings. For balancing the perspective, which entailed in many instances the omission of certain details and the reconciliation of contradictory ones, the criteria have been Guru Nanak's compositions and the manifestation of his teaching in the life of the community which was the outcome of it. The importance of the Guru's own word for this purpose is clearly evident. But the rich interplay of a religious leader and the faith which emerges from his message, of what he is and what he becomes to his followers is also of significance in understanding him and his work. An appreciation of how the remembrance of Guru Nanak continues, and is authentically expressed, in the community descended from him is a vital key in unlocking his life.

Among the four Janamsakhi cycles the *Puratan* is the oldest, though the manuscript which became the basis of it was discovered only in 1872. In the collection of Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837), a Sanskrit scholar and a member of the Council of the East India Company in Calcutta, it came to London in 1815 and remained, unknown and unexplored in the India Office Library. In 1872, copies of the Guru Granth and some Gurmukhi manuscripts were forwarded by the East India Company to the famous German Orientalist, Dr Ernest Trumpp, who had been commissioned to make an English translation of the Sikh Scripture. He found in this material an old document “partly destroyed by white ants,” with the short title, in Sanskrit characters, *Nanak ka Granth Janamsakhi ka*, i.e., the Book of Guru Nanak's Janamsakhi. On comparing this manuscript with the current accounts, he declared it to be the oldest and the fountainhead of the entire Janamsakhi tradition.⁹ When this came to the notice

⁹Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, p. ii.

of the Sikhs on the publication of Trumpp's work, they petitioned the British Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir Charles Aitchison, to have the newly discovered Janamsakhi brought to India for inspection. The manuscript arrived from the India Office Library in 1883 and copies were made at Government expense by photozincography and circulated privately as gifts from the Lieutenant-Governor. A lithographed edition was produced in 1884 for general distribution by a society of reformist Sikhs, the Singh Sabha of Lahore. This was received by the people as *Vilayat wali Janamsakhi*, or the Janamsakhi from Britain, which in common parlance was known as *vilayat*, or foreign land. Another popular name it acquired was *Colebrooke Janamsakhi* which recognized the fact that the original manuscript was donated to the India Office Library by Mr Colebrooke.

In 1884 was discovered by Bhai Gurmukh Singh of Oriental College, Lahore, another old manuscript in the town of Hafizabad in the Punjab. He gave it to Mr Max Arthur Macauliffe who was then working on his translation of the Sikh Scripture and life-histories of the Gurus. Macauliffe had it published at his own expense in an easily read format by punctuating the text and spacing out the words as against the connected undivided traditional form of Gurmukhi calligraphy. This version came to be known as *Hafizabad wali Janamsakhi*, or *Macauliffe wali Janamsakhi*.

The Colebrooke and the Macauliffe manuscripts were essentially identical, with only minor and occasional verbal variations and appeared to have been copied from the same source. By collating these and supplying from the Macauliffe manuscript the missing lines in the fragile pages of the former, Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957), the celebrated Punjabi poet and scholar, produced a composite recension which

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was published in 1926 as *Puratan Janamsakhi*, or the Old Janamsakhi. The text as well as the name is now accepted as standard. The third edition of this Janamsakhi brought out by Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar, in 1948, has been utilized for reference for the present work.

Evidence, external as well as internal, especially the diction, the script of the oldest manuscript discovered and the archetypal character of its story, makes this out to be the oldest known Janamsakhi. But, again, by certain marks in the text, it could not have been written earlier than eighty years or so after the death of Guru Nanak. If there was an antecedent version of which existing manuscripts are copies, or, in certain ways, variations, it has not so far come to light.

A Janamsakhi whose presence has always been recognized but of which no full and authentic version had been discovered until very recently is the work of Sodhi Meharban (1581-1640)—the only Janamsakhi so firmly ascribable to a single author. Meharban was the grandson of Guru Ram Das (1774-81), the Fourth Guru, but his father Prithi Chand had fallen away from the main Sikh tradition. This stigmatized his *Janamsakhi*. It was regarded as schismatic and shunned by the orthodox. But since the discovery, in 1940, by Dr Ganda Singh of an authentic manuscript and specially since its publication in 1962, interest in it has been widespread. The framework is generally that of the traditional Janamsakhi, but with a preponderance of *goshts*, or discourses, to explicate and interpret the *shabads* from Guru Nanak's compositions. This has much reduced the proportion of the biographical element which is negligible considering the huge volume of the work.

Of all the contributors to the Janamsakhi tradition, Meharban was doubtlessly the most learned. His prose is more sophisticated—at places, scintillating. He freely drew

upon Arabic and Persian words as well as words of Sanskrit origin and could vary their mutual proportion to match the situation he was describing. His language is a form of Hindwi which developed in the Punjab as a result of Hindu-Muslim contact and finally took the shape of Urdu. He also had a sense of the dramatic and the historical and his descriptions of some of the aspects of Guru Nanak's early life at Talwandi have a striking vividness of detail. But these peter out soon after into expository dialogues, which is a pity. Meharban was born of the Gurus' family and had gained the confidence of Guru Arjun in spite of his father's estrangement from him. With his literary capacity and proximity to the sources of the Sikh faith, he could have drawn a more concrete outline of Guru Nanak's life than he did. On one particular point, i.e., the date of the Guru's birth, his testimony is much prized by modern scholarship. The time of the composition of his *Janamsakhi* is about the same as that of the *Puratan*. The manuscript of which Meharban's work forms the first section consisted of six *pothis*, or books, only three of which were traced in 1940. The Meharban volume, styled in the manuscript as *Pothi Sachkhand*, was edited by Kirpal Singh and published by Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1964, with the title *Janamsakhi Guru Nanak Devji*.¹⁰ In the present work, it is referred to as *Meharban Janamsakhi*.

Until the discovery of the *Puratan* manuscripts, the one *Janamsakhi* which was commonly known and accepted was that of Bhai Bala. In spite of the severely critical scrutiny to which it has been subjected in the present century, it

¹⁰The second volume of the manuscript, originally known as *Pothi Harji*, has since also been printed by Khalsa College. It is attributed to Meharban's son Harji, and continues the life of Guru Nanak from where the first volume left it off. But the narrative is almost completely submerged by exposition and discourse. In the text here, it is referred to as *Meharban Janamsakhi*, Vol. II.

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continues to sway the popular imagination. The reason lies in the long-standing tradition behind it and in its claim that it was written in the presence of Guru Angad (1539–52), Guru Nanak's successor, from the dictation of Bhai Bala, reputed to be one of the First Guru's associates. This claim is easily rejectable. The language of the *Janamsakhi* is manifestly of a later epoch and there are other indications in the text pointing to a more recent origin. The historicity of Bhai Bala himself has been questioned. The manuscripts of the *Janamsakhi* which have come down are heavily interpolated by the heretical sect of the Hindalis who added stories to give their own leader, Hindal, himself a pious Sikh, an exalted position by the side of Guru Nanak. The more obvious of such elements were expunged when the *Janamsakhi* began to be printed in the seventies of the last century. But the text is still not exempt from accretion and exaggeration and needs to be approached with caution. The edition quoted in the present work was published in Lahore by Rai Sahib Munshi Gulab Singh & Sons in the Nanakshahi year 454 (A.D. 1923).

The fourth *Janamsakhi*, admittedly of later origin, is ascribed to Bhai Mani Singh who was a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh and lived up to 1734. In the prologue it is stated that some Sikhs petitioned Bhai Mani Singh to retrieve Guru Nanak's *Janamsakhi* from the distortions of the schismatics. Bhai Mani Singh answered by saying that Guru Arjun had guarded against such corruption by having Bhai Gurdas write his *Var* which was the authentic *Janamsakhi*. The Sikhs urged that Bhai Gurdas' *Var* contained only hints which needed to be elaborated. Bhai Mani Singh pleaded his incompetence to write commentaries on a work by a man of the genius of Bhai Gurdas, but in the end agreed to attempt the task. The argument in the prologue is interesting in so far as it recognizes the fact of the

Janamsakhi tradition being perverted, and truly evaluates the character of the *Var* written by Bhai Gurdas and his position in Sikh piety and learning. But it seems that Bhai Mani Singh's name has been introduced for the authority it carried. According to the epilogue, the *Janamsakhi* when completed was presented to Guru Gobind Singh for his approval. Whatever Bhai Mani Singh's position among the Sikhs, in Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime the kind of problem which was supposed to have been posed to him would almost certainly have been presented to the Guru rather than to any of his followers. Bhai Mani Singh's authorship of this *Janamsakhi* is also discounted by the fact that its diction is not of his time. As one of the closest companions and followers of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mani Singh had lived through a stirring and heroic era and had, like other devoted Sikhs of the period, acquired something of its temper and vocabulary. Yet in the whole *Janamsakhi* one solitary word which is reminiscent of the martial *patois* of those times is *deggha*,¹¹ a typical variation on the word *deggh*, meaning cauldron. Suspending the question of authorship, this work marks a stage, however equivocal, in the growth of the Janamsakhi tradition. Originally entitled *Gian Ratanavali*, it is mentioned here by its popular name of *Bhai Mani Singh Janamsakhi*.

The *vars* (ballads) and *kabitts* (couplets) written by Bhai Gurdas (1551-1639) to expound the Sikh way of life contain scattered references to Guru Nanak, mostly in the form of eulogy. But cantos 23-45 of *Var I* present an account of him which, despite its brevity, is illuminating. It basically corresponds to the Janamsakhi perspective, though it is written in verse and is much restricted in scope. The time is almost the same as that of *Puratan Janamsakhi*. Apart from

¹¹P. 166.

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the trust the testimony of Bhai Gurdas will exact because of his intimate contact with Guru Nanak's successors and with some of the important surviving Sikhs of his time, his judgement about the religious and social significance of the Guru's mission and the formation of the faith arising from it will strike one as especially penetrating. Also in verse is *Suchak Parsang Guru Ka*,¹² which alludes in summary to all the important events of Guru Nanak's career. It is written by Bhai Bahilo who was a contemporary of Bhai Gurdas. In thirty-eight couplets it covers the entire life-span following, in the main, the pattern which was subsequently popularized by *Bala Janamsakhi*.

Important among the later works are prose and poetical versions of *Mahima Prakash* and *Nanak Prakash*. The *Mahima Prakash Vartak* (prose) was written by Kirpal Singh Bhalla in 1741 and *Mahima Prakash Kavita* (verse) by Sarup Das Bhalla in 1776. Each contains accounts of the lives of all the Gurus. The portions on Guru Nanak in both run parallel except that the prose version is much shorter. It contains 20 *sakhis* over against 66 of the poetical version. Both works remain in manuscript except for the life of Guru Nanak from *Mahima Prakash Vartak* which was printed in Dehra Dun in a limited edition in 1959.

Broadly, the *Mahima Prakash* versions belong to the *Puratan* tradition, whereas *Nanak Prakash*, completed by Bhai Santokh Singh in 1823, falls within the *Bala* stream. But this latter has been immensely more influential of the two. The reason has been Bhai Santokh Singh's superb gifts of poetry and the fame he achieved by his monumental work embracing the lives of the ten Gurus. His *Nanak Prakash* is, in essence, an elaboration of *Bala Janamsakhi*.

¹²The only known manuscript of this work is in the private collection of Dr Ganda Singh.

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In spite of his undoubted creative powers, Bhai Santokh Singh has not been able either to capture the epoch of Guru Nanak or impart substance to his portrayal of his life. In this respect, his poetic prowess was much better exploited in the lives of the later Gurus and his success with these brought somewhat unmerited repute to his account of the First Guru. However, *Nanak Prakash* still remains the most prestigious work on Guru Nanak and is regularly read and expounded before congregations in the Gurdwaras. It comprises the first three of the fourteen volumes of the poet's *magnum opus*, admirably edited by Bhai Vir Singh and published by Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar.

Among modern works, Bhai Vir Singh's own *Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar*, compiled in 1928, commands considerable popular appeal. It aims at an imaginative recreation of the life of Guru Nanak, retaining the basic historical setting. In fact, the author raises in the footnotes and asides some important questions demanding research which is obviously the result of his deep and prolonged encounter with this theme while editing Bhai Santokh Singh. Giani Gyan Singh's *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, the first part of which is termed by the author as *Janamsakhi* of Guru Nanak, endeavours to supply chronology and place-names for some of the stories in the *Janamsakhis*. This also is apparently the concern of Sahib Singh whose biography of Guru Nanak has been recently serialized in a Punjabi magazine *Alochna*. Giani Gyan Singh was a great traveller and visited many of the places connected with the life of the Guru. Sahib Singh has mentioned in his account some precise dates making his calculations primarily from some of the major religious festivals on the Indian calendar during the years of Guru Nanak's itineracy. But no verification is possible in the absence of any other data. No problem in attempting a life of Guru Nanak is more intractable than

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fixing the chronology and geography of his travels. Available information, when it is not fancifully wide of the mark, is meagre and self-conflicting. Solidly confirmable signposts which could serve as authentic points of reference are few, with the result that any factual presentation on the subject will remain open to cavil and to the charge of arbitrariness. But the persisting contrariety on incidental details need not affect the essential veracity of Guru Nanak's picture which can be recreated from the existing material with a fair degree of certainty.

In English, the first publication was a translation of a Persian manuscript *Risala-i-Nanak Shah*, the Journal of Nanak Shah.¹³ This Persian text was prepared, from an unknown Devanagari manuscript, for Major James Browne, the East India Company's minister at the Mughal court at Delhi, who was interested in collecting information about the Sikhs, then establishing themselves in possession of the Punjab. Browne himself made an English translation from the Persian and published it, with an introduction, in 1788, under the title *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*. This was the first published work on the Sikhs in any language. It came eighty years after the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh and nearly a hundred years before the first printed Janamsakhi. The account of Guru Nanak in Browne's tract was very brief and rudimentary. Accounts, somewhat similar in nature and scope, appeared in the later English writing prompted by diplomatic curiosity about the Sikhs, their religion and country, in the memoirs and diaries of travellers and adventurers who came to the Punjab attracted by the stories of the grandeur of the

¹³Shah, which is Persian for the word king, was a common suffix for the names of Muslim holy men. This was added to Guru Nanak's name by his Muslim admirers and disciples. Among the Muslims he is still remembered by this name.

Sikh court under Ranjit Singh (George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, 1798), and in the books and journals of the European employees of the Sikh ruler (Steinbach, *The Punjaub*, 1845). There were also some more regular essays published such as Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*, 1812, H.T. Prinsep's *The Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, 1834, and W.L.M. Gregor's *The History of the Sikhs*, 1846. The description of the beginnings of Sikhism in these books was largely based on hearsay or on the manuscripts prepared for the authors by their Indian assistants and scribes. The details of Guru Nanak's life supplied to them were generally treated with a degree of cynicism. The object of the writers of this period was more to characterize the historical role of the faith which originated in Guru Nanak's message and the political ascendancy it had gained in the time of Ranjit Singh. This kind of writing continued even after the annexation of the Sikh territory to the dominions of the East India Company in 1849. An essay "Sikhland, or the country of Baba-Nanak"¹⁴ written in 1859 by Robert Needham Cust, one of the earliest Punjab civilians, became popular. It recounted the life of Guru Nanak in the details gathered from *Bala Janamsakhi* and, as is apparent from the title, stressed the significance of his creed for the Punjab.

The first English work utilizing the original sources was *History of the Sikhs*, 1849, by Joseph Davey Cunningham, a captain in the army of the East India Company, who acquainted himself with the Sikh Scripture and the relevant Persian and Punjabi manuscripts. His sketch of Guru Nanak remains brief, but his appraisal of the social setting into which he was born and of the creative principle he

¹⁴It was included in Robert Needham Cust's *Linguistic and Oriental Essays*, 1880, London: Trubner & Co.

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conceived is not without significance. Dr Trumpp added to his translation of portions of the Guru Granth, published in 1877, a short account of Guru Nanak derived from the Janamsakhis. He also reproduced in English the whole of the Colebrooke manuscript as well as parts of what was apparently a perverted Hindali Janamsakhi. A full-scale life of Guru Nanak came from the pen of Max Arthur Macauliffe and comprised the first of the six volumes of his book, *The Sikh Religion*, published by Oxford in 1909. Macauliffe had thoroughly explored the oral as well as written Sikh tradition and produced a narrative closely adhering to it.

Of the modern English biographies by Sikh authors currently in circulation are Kartar Singh's *Life of Guru Nanak Dev* (1937), Narain Singh's *Guru Nanak Reinterpreted* (1965) and Gopal Singh's *Guru Nanak* (1967). One that has been allowed to lapse by the publishers is Sewaram Singh's *The Divine Master* (1930) which was an enlarged version of his earlier book published in 1904. Two concise statements of Guru Nanak's career are in *A Short History of the Sikhs* by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (Orient Longmans, Calcutta, 1950) and *A History of the Sikhs* by Khushwant Singh (Princeton University Press, 1963). An earlier work from Princeton—John Clark Archer's *The Sikhs*, 1946—gives an interesting, if somewhat discursive, study of the Guru drawing a parallel between Nanak the factual and Nanak the formless. Historically more searching and critical is the account by Indubhusan Banerjee in his book *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. I, 1937. In this tone is the latest work to come out on Guru Nanak. This is W.H. McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford, 1968). It contains an elaborate and scientific analysis of the Janamsakhi literature and a comprehensive and cogent essay on the Guru's teaching.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL MILIEU

IN the mounting years of man's known history some of the most pregnant and lucid moments have been those filled by the lives of inspired teachers of universal truths. Such moments are significant in so far as they confirm and accelerate the laws of charity and progress and thus enlarge the human estate as a whole. In the historical sense, they mark the response of sensitive and humanitarian spirits to situations potent with ferment and challenge. One such challenge arose in India in the 15th century. With it arrived Guru Nanak. In his life were realized its full meaning and potentiality. He evoked from the situation then prevailing a new way of humane and meaningful living and made it the medium of bringing into the world intimations fresh and holy.

The mutual confrontation of two vital, but in several ways contradictory, culture-forms represented by Hinduism and Islam was the central fact of the medieval Indian situation. The two streams had been running their parallel course since the beginning of the Muslim invasions in the 8th century. Points of contact were scanty and such as did emerge in course of time had produced only tenuous forms of coalition. Marks of mutual concession were not entirely missing : developments, in fact, did take place in the social, cultural and religious spheres pointing towards a synthesis. But somehow the process remained unrealized. India had not encountered such a situation before.

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Wave upon wave of nomadic tribes and other invading hosts from across Central Asia and regions in the west, who had successively forced their way into India, had been imperceptibly sucked into the Hindu social order. Perhaps in no other part of the world have so many different races and cultures met and coalesced as in northern India. Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Scythians, Kushans and Huns came in an unending sequence. They created temporary upheavals, but faded off eventually into the all-absorbing scene one after another. Even the Greeks, with a distinct and, in certain respects, superior civilization, could not impede the inevitable course. The Hellenistic ideals of humanism, beauty and art failed to make any impact on philosophic Hinduism. The Greeks were treated with the scorn the Indians reserved for all outsiders. The term "Yavanas" they used for them later acquired a pejorative meaning and came to be identified with the word "barbarians." Buddhism, then strong in north-west India, did accept the Greek influence to the extent that, for the first time, the figures of the Buddha began to be made. This Buddha image executed in the Hellenistic style became the token of the Gandhara school of sculpture. But beyond this and beyond certain ethnic traces nothing suggestive of the Greek connection survived in the country. As for this ethnic singularity, one may still come across in the Punjab and further west a wiry peasant with an athletic ethos about him and with finely shaped features typical of the Grecian statuesque mien.

The Muslims brought with them the enthusiasm of a newly acquired religious faith and an outlook completely different from that of the Hindus on many fundamental points. Hinduism at that time was polytheistic, iconographic and ascetical, while Islam was monotheistic, iconoclastic and socially motivated and practical. The former was

tolerant in its religious attitude, but had developed a rigidly corseted social structure: the latter had a liberal social system, but was bigoted and fanatical in its religious belief. The coming together of two such diverse peoples, of two such mutually exclusive viewpoints was one of history's most sensitive and vital moments. The situation had possibilities both for creative synthesis and rejective hostility.

The first Muslim contact with India came through sea-faring Arabs who had established busy trade settlements in the southern peninsula in the first half of the seventh century. From this connection the Coromandal coast, the meeting-point of a diversity of trade routes, came to be known as Ma'bar, which is Arabic for "passage." Arab arms then started making extensive wars of conquest. From the fall of Persia in 670 to that of Spain in 711, the Arabs had brought under their authority half of the known world. They had reached this dominance within eighty years of the death of Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. In the year of the conquest of Spain, an expedition came to Sind which was taken from Raja Dahir after a protracted campaign. The Indian prince fully matched the invaders' courage and died in action fighting chivalrously. With the subsequent conquest of Multan, the Muslim foothold extended to south-west Punjab. But further progress was halted by the firm resistance offered by neighbouring Hindu chieftains. The Arab rule in Sind lasted three centuries. With the decline of the imperial authority of the Khilafat, it began to show signs of weakness and the mutual wrangling of the dynasties into which it split led to its final extinction. The physical remnants were wiped out by natural calamities such as earthquakes and no traces of Arab legacy remained in the form of buildings, mosques or tombs.

Politically, the Arab conquest was an isolated episode

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in the history of India, but its cultural consequences were of a far more significant and permanent nature. The Arabs “familiarized themselves from early times with Indian literature and sciences.”¹ Much of what they learned from Indians eventually reached Europe through the Mediterranean and Continental countries under their sway. Several elements of European civilization which are traced to Arab influence were in fact derived from India. For instance, the Arab numerals, so known in the West but called Indian numerals (*al-ruqum-al-Hindiyyah*) by the Arabs themselves as well as the zero and the decimal-place system which became the basis of modern arithmetic, are Indian in origin and were imbibed by the Arabs from the Hindus and introduced into Europe. The word “hindsah” meaning numeral, is indicative of its Indian association. According to Amir Khusrau, it is compounded of “Hind”, and “Asa” which was the name of a famous Indian mathematician.² Arab astronomy and medicine were influenced by the Hindu systems. A bureau of translation known as Bait-ul-Hikmat was established at Baghdad to translate into Arabic learned books in languages such as Sanskrit and Greek.³ The famous Sanskrit work *Brahma Siddhanta* was taken to Baghdad by an Indian astronomer and translated into Arabic with the help of an Arab mathematician Ibrahim Fazari. Works of eminent authorities in Hindu medicine such as Susruta and Charaka were similarly translated. A translation of *Panchtantra* became popular under its Arabic title *Kalila wa Dimna* and was instrumental in transmitting India’s folklore fables to distant lands. The

¹Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p. 66.

²*The Nuh Siphr*, edited by Mohammed Wahid Mirza, p. XXX. Over against this, modern scholars tend to derive the etymology of the word rather from an earlier form of what is now Persian *andazah*, meaning measurement.

³Syed Mahmud, *Hindu-Muslim Cultural Accord*, p. 22.

Arabs learned from the Hindus games like chess and *chaupar* which travelled in their wake to many other parts of the world.

Nor was Hindu science ignored. Scholars, mathematicians and physicians from India were made welcome at the Khalifa's court. Indo-Arab contacts in the fields of learning and science increased as the Barmakides, converts from Buddhism, acquired ministerial authority under the Abbasid Khalifa. They invited scholars to Baghdad from India, gave them employment at the court and encouraged translations of Sanskrit books. A practitioner of Ayurveda, Manka by name, was sent for to treat Khalifa Harun-ar-Rashid for an illness which the Baghdad doctors could not cure. Another Indian physician was called to attend upon a cousin of the Khalifa who had been taken ill with a paralytic stroke. Mention is also made of Ayisha, the Prophet's widow, having had a physician from India to wait on her. Dhan, a Hindu physician, was in charge of the hospital at Baghdad.

From the other direction, Arab scholars came to make their home in India. Centres of learning devoted to Muslim theology sprang up in Sind and Multan. Abu Ma'shar, a celebrated Arab astronomer, visited Benares to study the Indian theories with Hindu scholars and remained there for ten years. Similarly, another scholar, Ismail, came to read astrology as did Ahmad Khafi Darlani to read astronomy and mathematics. A more tangible cultural link materialized when Arabic characters began to be used for writing the Sindhi language.

The Turks, who followed the Arabs into India and concluded their raids of plunder by founding a central Muslim kingdom at the beginning of the thirteenth century, lacked their predecessors' genius for civilization. A narrow and insular cultural perspective gave them a peculiar

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complex in their dealings with the subject race. Their appreciation of India's learning and her way of life was not as natural as that of the Arabs. They remained aloof and self-conscious. The kind of intercommunication which had started under the Arabs so spontaneously remained in abeyance and was not in evidence again until much later in the Indo-Muslim history:

As the control of the Khilafat at Baghdad loosened, the Afghan Turks broke away from it and set up an autonomous rule in Ghazni. They subdued the Brahman dynasty which had held sway over parts of Afghanistan and north-west Punjab for several generations. The mountain routes to India now lay open before them and the historical circuit again became alive with the march of armies down into the plains. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, who started raiding in 998, led seventeen expeditions into India. Muhammad Ghauri, who came a century and a half later, began to occupy the country. Upon his death in 1206, one of his former slaves, Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, established the Muslim kingdom of Delhi. This Delhi Sultanate lasted until 1526. The "Slave" kings were followed by four successive dynasties—the Khaljis, the Tughlaks, the Sayyids and the Lodhis. Timur's invasion in 1398 dealt a severe blow to the Sultanate which finally fell a prey to another invading host when, in 1526, Babar defeated the last Lodhi king Ibrahim at Panipat to claim the throne of India for the Mughals.

The Turks, essentially nomadic and tribal in their ways and temperament, came first as plunderers. With the object of loot was mixed a crusading zeal for the chastisement of the infidels of India. Much misery and spoliation resulted from their repeated raids. Apart from mass killings, Hindu temples were defiled and women and children carried away. The settled State which supplanted this period of disorder and uncertainty was generally harsh and discriminatory

towards the non-Muslims. The Hindus answered by invoking their reserves of inner strength. They fell back upon their defensive social apparatus and sought security in keeping apart from the Muslims. But between these two dominant attitudes, there were shades and nuances of emphasis and motivation, of compromise and concession which would invalidate any simple generalization. The Muslim rule was *Shari'at*-based, but, in character with its despotic nature, the ultimate authority in it rested with the ruler. His personal temperament and the facts of the political situation in which he found himself were factors which inevitably influenced policy-making. The stronger of the Delhi Sultans were able to bypass or keep in check the *'ulama*, the Muslim theologians. Even the fanatics among the rulers had to recognize the prevailing realities. Iltutmish, the second of the "Slave" kings and the real founder of the Sultanate, was a Muslim of "exemplary faith" who did not wish to depart in the slightest detail from the religious law, the *Shari'at*, either in his personal or public conduct. In that early period of the Sultanate regime, he was faced with the question of how the Hindus might be treated in the Muslim State. According to three out of four schools of Islamic law, idolaters had no place in a Muslim country and had to be exterminated. The *'ulama* pressed this traditional interpretation upon Iltutmish and urged him to carry it into effect. The Sultan called an assembly and wished to hear the views of his minister, Nizam-ul-Mulk Junaidi. The latter made a statement dictated by common sense and prudence and, citing the facts of the insecurity of the Muslim conquest, still in its early stages, and the vast superiority in numbers of the Hindus, he advised him against a course of action that might cause any trouble. The argument prevailed for its sheer practicality.

The *'ulama* were influential in their own way and the

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Sultans did as a rule treat them with deference. Some of them adopted a deliberately hostile policy towards the non-Muslims with a view to placating their theocratic advisers. But the rulers eventually managed to arrive at an adjustment with them by extending to them the courtesy due to their position, without accepting any checks on their freedom of decision and action. They had established easy and luxurious standards of living, with vast harems, carousing and merry-making. They were imitated in this by the ranked nobility who had their own harems, *pan*-bearers (Amir Khusrau's maternal grandfather had fifty to sixty of them to carry *pan*, or betel-leaf for chewing, alone to his parties) and suites of attendants and slave-girls. Still the 'ulama were always anxious to see and placard the rulers in the role of defenders of Islam. Some of the court-annalists, similarly disposed, tended to exaggeration in the accounts of their masters' campaigns for the exaltation of Islam and abasement of the Indian religion. Afif, the chronicler, was at pains in his *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi* to counteract what he termed as "the slander of the infidels" suggesting that Sultan Firuz had spared the idol in the temple of Jawalamukhi at the time of his conquest of Kangra.

The rulers' sense of expediency or, in some cases, their freedom from bigotry, and the compulsions of neighbourly living led to the relaxing of barriers between the Hindus and the Muslims. As time passed, they came closer to each other and the opportunities of social intercourse increased. While the ruling race was confined to urban areas, the village economy remained predominantly Hindu. Only through the local hierarchy did the Muslim government have access to it. Trade and commerce were mostly in the hands of the Indians. Even in cities, not excluding Delhi which was the capital of the Sultanate until Sikandar

Lodhi shifted to Agra in 1504, Hindu merchants and money-lenders prospered. The latter had some of the influential Muslim nobles and courtiers in their debt. Ibn Battutah, who came to India in 1333, referred in his book of travels to the existence of a cloth-market inside Badayun Gate, in Delhi, in which locality the Hindu merchants, called Multanis, lived. In Daulatabad, almost as large as Delhi in those days and which had temporarily been made the capital in 1326–27 by Muhammad Tughlak, the Moorish traveller found that most of the merchants were Hindus. So were the leading jewellers of the place.

Court employment created further avenues of Hindu-Muslim contact. Mahmud of Ghazni had a Hindu contingent in his army with high-ranking officers such as Sewand Rai and Tilak.⁴ The Hindus were generally excluded from recruitment to the army during the time of the Sultanate, but certain categories of civil appointments were open to them. The revenue rank and file in the villages had, of necessity, to be Hindu, for there were not enough Muslims to fill the vast cadre. Besides being *muqaddams*, *khuts* and *chaudharis*, in the country, the Hindus occupied official posts in the court at Delhi and in other towns in the empire. Conversions and matrimony were two other factors which diluted exclusivism. The growing commerce between the Hindus and the Muslims altered, within certain limits, the configuration of the two societies and set in motion a process of reconciliation which impinged upon life in its various aspects—cultural, literary, artistic and religious.

A way to intellectual understanding was opened by the celebrated Arab scholar Alberuni who came to India in the train of Mahmud of Ghazni and studied and appreciated the philosophy and sciences of the Hindus. He learned

⁴Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p. 136.

Sanskrit and made translations into this language from Greek and Arabic.⁵ In his book *Kitab al-Hind*, he gave a comprehensive and discerning survey of the religion, customs and institutions of the people of India. Indian learning and philosophy attracted the notice of scholars who converged on the Sultanate capital of Delhi, especially after the sack of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols. But truly integrative in genius was Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), Indian-born courtier, poet and scholar. He was the best exemplar of the cultural intermingling that had started in India, a process made tangible in his poetry and in the linguistic and musical innovations he introduced. His patriotic feeling for India gained elegant and sensitive utterance in a section of his historical masnavi, *Nuh Sipahr*, or the “Nine Skies.” In this poem which he wrote to pay homage to his royal master and patron Mubarak Shah, he panegyricized the country and its people. To him India was a paradise on earth—a land worthy of praise for its flowers, fruit and climate and for being the home of learning. He praised Indians for their proficiency at languages and for inventing the numerical system and creating *Panchtantra*, the great book of worldly wisdom which had been translated into Persian, Turkish and Tazi (Arabic). An important work produced in Persian verse in the time of the Tughlaks was *Dala’il-i-Firuz Shahi*. It was based on translations of Sanskrit books on subjects such as philosophy, divination and omens which were seized from the temple of Jawalamukhi upon the fall of the fortress of Nagarkot to Sultan Firuz Shah (1351–88).⁶

The reign of Sikandar Lodhi (1488–1518), who, according

⁵Edward Sachau in his *Alberuni's India*, p. XIX, says, “His [Alberuni's] work as a translator was a double one. He translated from Sanskrit into Arabic and from Arabic into Sanskrit.”

⁶R. C. Majumdar, *et al.*, *An Advanced History of India*, p. 321.

to Firishtah, the historian, "was firmly attached to the Muhammadan religion and made a point of destroying all Hindu temples,"⁷ was most severe and inquisitorial in its treatment of the non-Muslims. Even during this period of extreme fanaticism and persecution, the cultural intercourse between the two religious traditions continued. The Sanskrit classics were studied and translations were made from these into Persian. A famous work produced was Mian Bhuva's *Tibb-i-Sikandari*, a medical treatise based on ancient Hindu sources. The first work on Indian music in Persian also belonged to this period. It was called *Lahjat-i-Sikandar Shahi*. Sikandar Lodhi encouraged Hindus to learn Persian and made awards of *jagirs* to those who showed special interest in the language. He founded *madrasahs* at Mathura, Narwar and other places which were open to Muslims and Hindus alike.⁸ A fairly extensive educational system was maintained by the State during the Sultanate period. It is recorded that there were one thousand *maktabs* and *madrasahs* in Delhi in the time of Muhammad Tughlak. The former were primary schools attached, as a rule, to mosques teaching Arabic and Persian and some arithmetic, while the latter were colleges of higher learning where both *ma'qulat* (rational sciences) and *manqulat* (tradition) were studied.

The necessity of communication between the two races resulted in a mixture of the languages which created a new channel of reciprocity and possibilities of a joint endeavour in the fields of literature and culture. The court language under the Sultans was Persian. Arabic was the language of Muslim theology and Turkish the speech of the rulers. Persian was made the language of official administration in the Punjab when it formed part of the Ghaznavid empire.

⁷Briggs, *History of the Rise of Mohamedan Power in India*, Vol. I, p. 586.

⁸Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 76.

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As a result of the contact between Persian and Lahori (from Lahore, the capital city of the province), which was the then prevalent form of Punjabi, a new language of everyday use combining the vocabulary of both began to take shape. According to Amir Khusrau, Mas'ud bin Sa'ad Salman, born in Lahore about 1048, wrote poetry in Arabic, Persian and Hindwi—the composite language which was arising from the mixture of Persian and Punjabi. He introduced into Persian a new form called *Dwazdah Maha*, modelled on the Punjabi *Baramaha*, or the Poet's Calendar. With the establishment of the Ghauri kingdom in Delhi, there was a large influx into the Indian capital of Persian-knowing Muslims and Hindus from Lahore. The local dialect, Khari Boli, was influenced by Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Punjabi and through the leaven thus created was eventually born a kind of *lingua franca* which, gradually shaped to a delicate and finished texture under courtly patronage, came to be known as Urdu, the most intimate and refined product of the Indo-Muslim genius. The recession of Sanskrit following the advent of Muslim rule brought the local Indian languages into prominence. Amir Khusrau, who, according to his own testimony wrote verse in Hindwi,⁹ mentioned several of these, i.e., Sindhi, Lahori, Kashmiri, Bengali, Oudhi, and so on. Both Hindus and Muslims contributed to the development of these languages. The process was accelerated by the dispersal of scholars from Delhi to other parts of the country as a consequence of Timur's invasion and by the emergence of provincial courts after the authority of the Sultanate had weakened.

In no other field did the Hindu-Muslim interaction

⁹The Hindwi verses, riddles and conundrums ascribed to Amir Khusrau approximate to a much later form of the speech from which arose Hindi and Urdu, and represent perhaps a modernized version of what he wrote. Cf. Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, p. 42.

produce a more nearly perfect fusion than in music. From the Indian and Persian systems of music were evolved new common forms and melodies. Some of these are attributed to Amir Khusrau. He is credited with being the originator of the popular *khayal* in place of the traditional *dhrupad*. The highly formalized temple and devotional music of India was thus modified to serve secular purposes of court entertainment. Amir Khusrau gave vogue to *ghazal* and invented *qawwali*, a popular song-form, and the instrument called Sitar which represented a combination of the Indian Veena and the Iranian Tambur. The Muslim musicians accepted the basic Indian scales and the Hindus accepted the mutations and changes introduced by the Muslims. A similar spirit of mutual adjustment and acceptance was witnessed in the development of a new architectural style which was a blend of the Muslims' preference for austere, arcuate line and the Hindus' taste for heavy elaboration and adornment. Two of the factors which aided compromise were the Hindu stonemasons and craftsmen who had to be engaged by the Muslim rulers and the materials, especially the varieties of stone, available in India.¹⁰

In many minor details, Hindu and Muslim ways of life were influenced by each other. The Rajput custom of secluding the womenfolk was borrowed by the Muslims and made still more rigid and onerous by the introduction of the veil (*pardah*). The Turkish dress consisting of loose baggy trousers (*shalwar*), a tight gown (*qaba*), a loose outer robe (*jubbah*) and the turban became common wear for Muslims and Hindus of the upper classes. In the villages the Muslims lived more like their Hindu neighbours. A typical instance is cited of a Muslim saint, Shaikh Hamid-ud-Din, who "lived in a small mud-house and eked out his meagre sub-

¹⁰Cf. Abid Hussain, *Indian Culture*, p. 34.

sistence by cultivating a single *bigha* of land . . . He cultivated half of his land in one season and the other half in the next. He dressed like a typical Indian peasant and used two sheets of cloth to cover the upper and the lower parts of his body. He kept a cow in his house and himself milked it. His wife . . . spent her time in cooking and spinning . . . like most of the villagers amongst whom they lived. Shaikh Hamid-ud-Din was a strict vegetarian . . . The family carried on conversation in Hindwi."¹¹

The Muslims started celebrating Shab-i-Barat in the style of the Hindu festival of Shivaratri, with night-long vigils and fireworks. Similarly began saint and relic worship which gave rise to the practice among Muslims of white-washing the graves and lighting nightly lamps on them. The custom of bringing out, in the month of Muharram, of Ta'ziyas, or cenotaphs, as models of the mausoleums of the martyrs of Karbala, was reminiscent of the Hindu ceremonial procession, in a chariot, of Jagannath, or Vishnu, one of the gods of the Hindu Trinity. This annual ritual was unknown in any other country.¹²

The modifications, however slight, which the two religious systems underwent as a result of mutual contact marked by far the most significant and positive step towards accommodation between them and the societies they demarcated. A common spiritual denominator was arrived at in this process. A passionately personal love of the Divine Being, eschewance of the external forms of piety, rejection of barriers between men and control of worldly desires were its main constituents. The Bhakti movement in Hinduism and Sufism in Islam shared these principles and became the instruments for their wide dissemination. This resulted in

¹¹Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, pp. 186-87.

¹²Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 127.

a welcome loosening of the spirit and the rigidities and prohibitions and in the establishment of new channels of communication and understanding. The signs of a new age, of a new society in birth were becoming evident.

Both Bhakti and Sufism had marked similarities and were characterized by a liberal and eclectic theosophy. The basic framework of each was determined by the religion it derived from and to which it remained essentially loyal. But the two popular movements clearly possessed a little of each other with distinct points of confluence. Sufism, based on Islam, bore signs of Hindu influence and Bhakti, rooted in Hinduism, carried an impress of Islam. How this approximation came about and how far it can be attributed to direct exchange is mostly a matter of surmise. Some of the Sufi traits are traceable to the presence of Indians, through political connection, in Baghdad, and, through trade, in Persia in the early years of the Khilafat. Contact with Buddhism which had dominated adjoining Central Asian territories went much further back. Hindu and Buddhist beliefs and practices thus made accessible might have impressed lone pietistic Muslims, the founders of Sufism, in whose souls was germinating a reaction against the courtly splendours of Imperial Baghdad. Monastic asceticism, reverence for the saintly recluse, yogi-like discipline of the body and a pantheistic abandon might have come to Sufism through this source.

Bhakti which took birth in the Tamil lyrics of Vaishnavite Alvars and Shaivite Nayanmars in the South might likewise have assimilated some of the Islamic ideas. After the last phase of Hun invasions under Toramana towards the end of the fifth century, northern India had respite from foreign incursions and enjoyed peace for nearly half a millennium, perhaps longer than any other country had witnessed in a single stretch of its history. But, barring Kashmir, it was

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for this entire region a period of stagnation and decay—one vast expanse of unbelievable barrenness and sterility. The South, on the contrary, was alive and progressive and experienced, especially in the realm of religion, a deep urge for renovation and reformulation. This remoulding of Hinduism which was primarily owed to Shankara's most vital and, philosophically, most brilliant enunciation of monism and to the exuberant lyricism of the Tamil saints might have begun under the influence of Islamic monotheism imbibed from the Arab traders and colonists. Maybe, the presence of Christianity, which had been introduced into South India with the Apostolate of Thomas in the first century and strengthened with the rise of the Church in East Syria, had also something to do with this development. These suggestions are conjectural as was the one regarding the debt of Sufism to Hindu thought, for monotheism was not unknown to Hinduism. But such pollination of ideas takes place in many diverse ways invisibly and subterraneously. Cultural and intellectual currents and cross-currents have an uncanny way of self-fertilizing and of manifesting themselves in surprisingly disparate geographical and social divisions, sometimes by reviving old moulds and concepts charging them with fresh meaning and energy and sometimes by creating new ones with little apparent resemblance to what had gone before.

The devotionalism of the mystics of the Tamil land was furnished with a philosophical base by Ramanuja, a twelfth-century thinker and reformer of South India. He countered Shankara's rigorously abstract theorizing by admitting the possibility of an emotional and personal apprehension of the Supreme Being. Like Shankara he believed in the unity of the Absolute, but perceived this unity as manifesting itself in the infinite variety of the phenomenal world. The system he propounded came to be

known as Vishishtadvaita, or qualified non-dualism, as against Shankara's Advaita, or non-dualism. In religious terms, God was conceived of as a Reality qualified with attributes—a loving father who could be adored and worshipped and invoked for blessing. Realization could come through his grace : so could even Karma be cancelled.

Ramanuja's teaching found favourable ground in northern India stirred by the broad-minded teaching of Muslim Sufis. It was introduced by a follower of his school, Ramanand, born of a Brahman family in Prayag. He travelled widely preaching Bhakti, or the religion of personal devotion, in the language of the people and soon won over a band of influential disciples. Among them were said to be men of different castes and faiths such as Ravidas, a shoemaker, Sena, a barber, Dhanna, a peasant, Pipa, a Rajput, and Kabir, a Muslim weaver. The last-named was the most important of them. In him the prevailing tendencies to reconciliation, reform and freedom from constricting belief and dogma were best represented. He lived at Benares, ancient centre of Hinduism, though, as the tradition says, he visited Jaunpur, a seat of Muslim learning, and had been in touch with Shaikh Taqi, a well-known Sufi. Kabir became one of the leading exponents of Bhakti. His special place in the movement was due to his intermediary role between the two religions and his common appeal addressed to their followers. His terminology was derived from the canon of both. Muslim terms such as Allah (the Supreme Being), Rahim (God the Merciful), Khuda (the Lord), Kalima (short statement of the Muslim creed), Sahib (the Lord), Ka'aba (the central sanctuary in the holy city of Mecca), Mullah (teacher of the Muslim doctrine), Qazi (a Muslim judge), Shaikh (the head of a Sufi order) and Tariqat (the way of faith) were used as freely in his hymns as the Hindu Rama (an incarnation of Vishnu;

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also used for God), Hari (another name for Vishnu), Brahma (first member of the Hindu Triad), Samrath (the Supreme Being) and Shakti (the Divine Mother, or female creative power). He was forthright in his denunciation of caste, ritualism and idolatry. Especially caustic and uninhibited were his satires on the pharisaical Pandits and Qazis who, in their allegiance to form, neglected the essential duty of religion. Kabir inculcated worship of One God. For himself he desired not heaven but absorption in the Absolute achievable through adoration and love alone. This fervent and, essentially, non-ritualistic religion was the concern of the Bhaktas and it gained vast upsurge in the various parts of India in the 14th and 15th centuries. In Maharashtra it was popularized by Jnanesvar and Namdev, in the Gangetic region by Ravidas, besides Ramanand and Kabir, in Rajasthan by Dhanna and in Bengal by Chaitanya. Bhakti thus became not only the vehicle of a religious reformation, but also the bearer of a social revolution of which the chief characteristics were the depreciation of caste, minimizing of the difference between the Hindus and the Muslims and a challenge to the existing forms of church.

The Muslim contribution to this environment of expanding sympathies and mutual receptiveness came through Sufi mystics who themselves espoused the principles of love and tolerance. A zealous, introvert quest for a vision of the Ultimate, total surrender to the divine will, personal abstemiousness and rectitude and a broad, humanitarian outlook constituted their saintly way. Travelling away from his home in Persia or Arabia, many a Sufi reached his journey's end in a permanent abode in India. Among them were men highly accomplished as scholars and gifted with illumination and insight. They acquired vast influence by their spiritual reputation and pious living.

Around them grew centres of religious culture and philanthropy. In these centres originated the various *silsilahs*, i.e., Sufi dynasties or orders, such as Chishti, Suhrawardi, Qadri, Naqshbandi and Madari.

The more important of the Sufi seats were in Lahore, Multan, Uch, Ajodhan (now Pakpattan), Sirhind, Samana, Hansi, Panipat, Karnal, Delhi, Ajmer and Gulbarga (Deccan). To Lahore had come a mystic and religious teacher, Shaikh Ismail, even before a Muslim governor had been appointed to the Punjab by Mahmud of Ghazni. The most distinguished name, however, was that of Shaikh Ali bin Usman Hujwiri (*d.* 1071). He was popularly called Data Ganj Bakhsh and his tomb in Lahore, rebuilt in marble by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) during the Sikh rule, remained through the centuries the most widely venerated shrine in the city. Besides being famous as a bestower of favours, he was known as a scholar and poet. His book *Kashf al-Mahjub* (“Unveiling of the Veiled”) is the earliest extant work on Sufism in Persian. One of Ali Hujwiri’s disciples, Sayyid Ahmad, had a considerable following among Hindus who remembered him by his popular name of Sultan Sarwar, or Lakh Data. Ajodhan was made famous by Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Mas’ud Ganj-i-Shakar (1173–1265) of the Chishti order. He was known in Sufi piety for his utter humility and stern austerity and became the beloved saint of a large number of people, both Muslims and Hindus. His Punjabi verse marked by a mood of intense yearning and penitence and by a remarkable chastity of expression is preserved in the Guru Granth. His celebrated disciple Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Awliya lived in Delhi. The founder of the Chishti order in India was Mu’in-ud-Din who came to the Punjab from Sistan. He travelled on to Ajmer, then under Rai Prithvi Raj, and lived there until his death in 1234. In

the South, Sufism received the greatest impetus from Hazrat Bandanawaz Gesudaraz (1321-1422) whose seat was in Gulbarga.

These and many other Sufi faqirs of varying importance were creating a new religious temper by their pursuit of the divine in a spirit of lyrical devotion, self-annihilation and denial of worldly comfort. Although they remained within the pale of Islamic *Shari'at* and kept the prescribed discipline of *nāmaḥ*, fasts and the *hajj* pilgrimage, the emphasis they laid on the immediacy of experience as against formal observances led to the softening of the rigours of orthodoxy. On certain points of Sufi innovation such as *sama'*, or the practice of listening to devotional music to generate transport of spiritual ecstasy, there was open conflict with the *'ulama*. Such debates had the effect of weakening the hold of established dogma and releasing thought from the shackles of tradition.

The image of a God-seeking, self-renouncing Sufi had an inevitable popular appeal for the Indian mind. It aroused the reverence of the Muslim as well as of the Hindu. Both visited the holy saint to obtain his benediction and favour and to have their wishes fulfilled. In some cases this contact resulted in proselytization. A considerable number of converts from Hinduism came into the fold of Islam in this manner. The *khanaqah*, or the hospice, over which the Sufi Shaikh presided, became the meeting-place not only for Muslims and Hindus, but also for the rich and the poor, nobles and commoners, poets and scholars. This *khanaqah* (also called *dargah*), essentially a mosque and travellers' resting home at the tomb of some holy man, was an institution which exercised far-reaching influence on the religious and social life in the Sultanate period. As the seat of some elect Sufi spirit or commemorating the memory of such a saint, it was the centre of attraction and pilgrimage

for the people. It lodged the casual wayfarer and the seeker who came to be instructed, the Shaikh's permanent companions and followers and, on special occasions such as *urs*, or the death anniversary of the patron saint, the large number of visitors who thronged to offer their homage. All slept on the ground and partook of the repast made available through private or public charity. The reading of the Qur'an, listening to spiritual discourses by the Shaikh, receiving blessing from him and participating in choric chanting of joyously stimulating religious songs by night were the concerns of the inmates and the visiting pilgrims alike.

The *khanqahs* also acted as levellers of men. The high and the low received there the same kind of treatment. Because of their disdain of worldly power, the Sufis, especially the Chishtis among them, avoided contact with those in authority and rejected political support. Shaikh Farid abstained from residence in Delhi to place himself out of easy reach of the mighty of the royal capital. His disciple Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din Awliya declined offers of gifts and land from Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khalji and once refused to receive the king in his house and said that, if he (the king) came, he would go out by another door.¹³ The Sufis' self-denial was sometimes carried to extreme limits. Shaikh Farid, one of whose wives was King Balban's daughter, reduced himself to such destitution that his children were nearly starved to death. An anecdote in the life of Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din Awliya narrates how he, upon seeing a woman draw water from a well near the bank of the river Jamuna, questioned her, "Why, good lady, do you impose upon yourself the toil of drawing water from the well when the river is so near?" The woman replied

¹³M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, p. 74.

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that her husband was a faqir and they never had enough to eat and that, since the river water made one feel hungry sooner than water from the well, she had perforce to choose the more laborious of the alternatives. This preference for poverty was accompanied in the Sufis by a spirit of humility and indifference to rank and position. They recognized no distinctions among their followers and the *khanqaqs*, where no one was honoured merely for his wealth or disregarded for his modesty of means, provided practical examples of their insistence on equality.

Though Sufism and Bhakti in their purest form concerned themselves mainly with private experience of the individual soul and could not as such become the religion of the common man, they had intuitive sympathy for him and opened his mind to a new way of thinking and feeling. They stirred the still waters of the contemporary stream of life and broadened its course. The influences they exerted in their respective spheres reinforced each other and accelerated the process of fraternization between Hinduism and Islam. The doctrinal differences were submerged in the overriding passion of the Hindu devotee and the Muslim mystic for a beatific moment of ravishment in the Infinite. With the inattention to the claims of dogma began the slackening of sacerdotal and ecclesiastical curbs. In helping to bring about these relaxations and in marking significant common ground between Hinduism and Islam, Sufism and Bhakti were beckoning to new developments in the life of the community as a whole.

The creative impulse of the times met with its fullest expression in Guru Nanak and received from him a definite stamp and direction. Affirmation and integration were the qualities of the religious prophecy he embodied. He presented a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance and of human equality and justice.

The historical conditions of the period, its urges and aspirations were brought to a positive focus in his discerning vision. The pangs and afflictions of the time aroused sensitive response in his compassionate heart. From the prevalent trends, some of them still vague and tentative, he evolved a complete, full-faced view of existential reality and the principles of belief and of moral and magnanimous action. In this lay the seed of a vital religious and social revolution. As important as the new manifestations of thought and life flowing from it was the person of Guru Nanak—gentle, humble and full of love and human kindness, melting into contemporary consciousness, through his poetic utterance and straightforward example, the message divinely laid upon him.

Like the Bhaktas and the Sufis, Guru Nanak proclaimed love of God and, through it, communion with Him as the primary aim of religion. More like the former, he repudiated caste and the importance of ritualism, and, in common with the latter, emphasized submission to God's will as the ultimate means to realization. Agreeably to the atmosphere created by Bhakti and Sufism, he rejoiced in singing praises of the Almighty and indicated the way to reconciliation between the Hindus and the Muslims. He brought to these general tendencies the force and urgency of a deeply inspired and forward-looking faith. He added elements which were characteristically his own and which empowered current trends with wholly new possibilities of fulfilment. Life in all of its different aspects was the subject of Guru Nanak's attention. Integral to his intuition was an awareness of the ills and errors of society and his concern to remedy these. This was in contrast to the attitude of escape implicit in Bhakti and Sufism. Guru Nanak did not admit, like many of their protagonists, the possibility of man ever attaining, in his mystical progress, equality with Divinity.

He also did not share the Bhaktas' belief in incarnation or the Sufis' insistence on bodily mortification and frenzied singing and dancing to bring about 'spiritual illumination.

Side by side with some of the salutary tendencies, there were influences at work which weakened and corroded the social fabric. Most injurious were the attitudes of credulity and self-flagellation. As if to create a mental bulwark against shocks and uncertainty proceeding from foreign invasions, the Punjab, at the time of Guru Nanak's advent, had pledged its faith to religious saints and faqirs, mendicants and recluses, of a variety of sects and descriptions. Apart from wool-clad, bearded Sufi dervishes and strolling Hindu *sants* who brought to laymen the fervour of theistic devotion, there were the split-ear, matted-hair Naths or Kanphata yogis, disciples of Avdhut Gorakh; ochre-robed sannyasis, or anchorites; fortune-telling Rawals; exorcist Amils; *kashkul*-carrying, begging Qalandars, followers of an order founded by an Hispanic Sufi; Buddhist monks; Jain Digambaras, or monks, worshipping naked idols; ascetical Atits vowed to abandonment of material things; Tantrikas with their secretly licentious observances; Malamatis, a sect of Sufis, deliberately courting *malamat*, or rebuke and disgrace, by reprehensible deeds with a view to overcoming their vanity and egoism; and pugnacious sadhus laying siege to villages and putting the inhabitants under heavy contributions with their indecorous and lewd antics. They went from place to place or retired to their hermitaries ministering to an unquestioning, superstitious populace. The orders they represented maintained the tradition of religious forbearance and mutual neighbourliness established by Bhakti and Sufism, but had developed in course of time many negative features. The basic weakness lay in their philosophy of withdrawal. Most of them sank into pure parasitism. Their followers had no qualms about

playing upon the people's gullibility. They resorted to all kinds of esoteric exercises to induce mental and corporeal abstraction and gain control over the material universe, practised healing, wrote out amulets and charms for their applicants, gave them cardamoms, cloves or pieces of candied sugar blowing upon them mystic incantations to relieve them of or prevent ill fortune, interpreted omens, read horoscopes and prognosticated the future. Thus they stalked the countryside exacting from the people their daily subsistence and fastening upon them a sombre, fatalistic view of life. A belief in the vanity of existence and passivity and pessimism had taken hold of the minds of men which isolated them completely from the environment in which they lived.

Guru Nanak's teaching took in man as a whole and sought in his improvement the advancement of society in general. In the midst of a plethora of mysterious faiths and practices, he raised song in praise of One Supreme Being adjuring the people to worship Him and Him alone. He preached a simple gospel of love, equality and service. Religion was presented as a matter of the heart and of ethical conduct, and not of mere outward formality. Guru Nanak transcended the pervading atmosphere of gloom and brought forth a vision of hope and fulfilment. He perceived clearly the symptoms of his age and marked out what was stagnant and degenerate from what was living and energetic. He rejected the effete symbols and created elements of a fresh, vigorous life. He meditated deeply on the causes of the prevailing decadence and was especially seized of the injury the despotic rule had done to the morality and self-esteem of the people and of the harmful effect upon them of abject surrender to superstition. His sacred poetry, humane and tender in tone, alluded to these shortcomings. Most telling and frank was his reference to the invasion of India by

Babar's armies. The agony of the situation was rendered in accents of deep power and protest. The event was read in terms of history's judgement upon a corrupt and tyrannical rule typified by the Lodhi monarchy. Such sensitivity to contemporary reality was unique in the entire Indian literature of the period.

The constructive trends initiated by Bhakti and Sufism received special stimulus from Guru Nanak. He took full cognizance of the presence of Islam in the country and his message was meant for both Hindus and Muslims. In his teaching Hinduism and Islam reached a point of concordance nowhere else realized. To quote from *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Guru Nanak "cut himself adrift from all associations with prevailing sectarian religions, and, although his approach to God was through love and devotion, he did not adopt the imagery or symbolism of Vaishnavism or any other creed. His was the first, and also the last, successful attempt to bring together the Hindus and Muslims in a common fold of spiritual and social brotherhood."¹⁴

Perhaps no one has said it better than Arnold Toynbee who, in his Foreword to an English edition of selections from the Guru Granth, wrote :

Nearly all the higher religions that count in the world today—in fact, all of them except Zoroastrianism—have originated in one or other of two regions : India and South West Asia. The Indian and Judaic religions are notoriously different in spirit; and, where they have met, they have sometimes behaved like oil and vinegar. Their principal meeting-ground has been India, where Islam has impinged on Hinduism violently. On the whole, the story of the relations between these two great religions on Indian ground has been an unhappy tale of mutual misunderstanding and hostility.

¹⁴R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, volume entitled "The Delhi Sultanate," p. 569.

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Yet, on both sides of this religious barrier, there has been a minority of discerning spirits who have seen that, at bottom, Hinduism and Islam are each an expression of the same fundamental religious truth, and that these two expressions are therefore reconcilable with each other and are of supreme value when brought into harmony. The Sikh religion might be described, not inaccurately, as a vision of this Hindu-Muslim common ground. To have discovered and embraced the deep harmony underlying the historic Hindu-Muslim discord has been a noble spiritual triumph; and Sikhs may well be proud of their religion's ethos and origin.¹⁵

The teacher who brought these truths into the light of day was Guru Nanak. And to the story of his life we now turn.

¹⁵*Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, translated by Trilochan Singh, et al., revised by George S. Fraser (London : George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1960), pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER III
THE BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD AT
TALWANDI

IN the time of Bahlol Khan, the first of the three Lodhi Muslim kings of India, there lived at Talwandi, a small village about 40 miles south-west of Lahore, an unknown Bedi family destined to be remembered in history. Bahlol, not quite as distinguished as his son Sikandar nor as fanatical, had, by a clever ruse, displaced the Sayyids whose rule had been weak and disorderly. The last of the Sayyid kings, Alam Shah, had retired to Badayun and left Delhi in the hands of his minister, Hamid Khan. Bahlol Khan, then a provincial governor, went to Delhi and called on the minister. At a banquet, his servants who had been so instructed, acted strangely. They hung shoes from their girdle-belts saying that it was a precaution against thievery. They ate flowers from the plate and left off the *pans* after smelling them for fragrance. Towards the minister who was their master's host they were obsequiously polite. They admired the colour of his *masnad*, or throne, and asked for pieces of drapery to be given them so that they could fashion their children's caps out of them. Bahlol explained that, like all Afghans, his servants were simple-minded hillmen innocent of the ways of court or city life. The following day while Bahlol was returning the minister's hospitality, the servants pressed for permission to go inside to pay their homage to the honoured guest. As a concession to their naivety, their request was granted. Entering the chambers,

they surrounded Hamid Khan's servants and cast down a chain in front of him to show that he was under arrest.¹ The throne of Delhi had changed hands, but perhaps never so bloodlessly.

Bahlol Khan (1451–88) attempted to regain control over territory and was able to give the Delhi kingdom a semblance of a State. The Punjab which he had held securely as governor at Sirhind was least disturbed by the reversal of dynastic fortunes. The country as a whole remained exempt for some time from north-westerly inroads and, in spite of the religious bigotry and intolerance of the new regime, a period of comparative peace was ushered in.

In the central Punjab, between the rivers Ravi and Chenab, lay Talwandi, not far from one of the two main routes into India across the north-western mountain ranges. Many different streams of invaders and immigrants, merchants and traders, pilgrims and travellers passed along this way through the centuries. Layers of history accumulated implanting in the region vigorous new people at frequent intervals and leaving upon it traits of several succeeding civilizations, races and tribes. Until the 10th century when Lahore gained prominence as the seat of Brahman kings driven from the Kabul valley, the area around Talwandi had been of central importance in the Punjab. Sakala, in this district, was mentioned in the *Mahabharata* as the capital of the Madras or Bahikas, the people of the Punjab. The inhabitants gave Alexander's armies strong resistance and suffered the complete destruction of their city for it. The capital shifted to a site near by. In Buddhist India it enjoyed the repute which belonged to its predecessor in earlier times. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese

¹Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-tu-Twarikh* (Urdu translation published by Central Urdu Board, Lahore), pp. 332–33.

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pilgrim, who visited it in 633, called it Tsekia, or Taki, and described it as a place upon which the whole of the Punjab, including Multan and Shorkot, was dependent.

In the neighbourhood of such seats of power and in the shadow of mighty events and strife, the village of Talwandi shared the uncertainty of the times. Among the residents the tradition prevails to this day that, during the course of her long history, thirteen times Talwandi was reduced to ruins, and thirteen times was it rebuilt. Such recuperative ability was not surprising in people subject to fresh calamity or intrusion with every new morning's sun. They had learned not to nurse their injuries. They set about reclaiming from smouldering fires whatever could be saved and did not take long to reconstruct their homes or sow the season's crops. With something of this spirit Rai Bhoë, one of the Bhatti Rajputs who were converted to Islam and held vast fiefs in the vicinity, rehabilitated Talwandi at the beginning of the 15th century. The village as founded by him has lasted up to modern times, but with the new name of Nankana Sahib.

The new Talwandi of Rai Bhoë was in Bahlol Khan Lodhi's days a growing village. Bhoë's son Rai Bular, who had inherited the estate upon his father's death, enhanced its population as well as prosperity. Husbandmen and artisans came from the surrounding districts in search of security. From near the site of the present city of Amritsar, on the other side of the Ravi, there arrived a family of Bedi Kashatriyas, Hindu by faith. Several such families lived in that village of the Muslim Bhattis.

The family which had come from across the Ravi gave to the village its revenue accountant. His name was Kalyan Chand, affectionately abridged, if not by his contemporaries certainly by chroniclers of a later date, to Kalu. Like his father Shiv Ram, Kalu kept the rent records for the Bhatti's

lands. In addition, he had his own small acreage to tend as well as a few head of cattle. He was contentedly married to Tripta, daughter of Rama of Chahalwala, a village south of Lahore. He had a daughter called Nanaki and a brother named Lalu.

Into this family was born in the early hours of the morning on April 15,² 1469, a son who was to be admired by later generations as one of the greatest teachers of mankind. According to Janamsakhi accounts, prodigies attended the advent, illustrious and remarkable. Light flashed across the mud-built room in which the birth took place. The gifted and the wise in the celestial regions and below rejoiced in the fortunate event and stood in obeisance to the superb spirit which had adopted bodily vesture in fulfilment of the divine will.

The father sat outside tense with expectation. Limitless was his joy when the midwife came out and announced to him that it was a male child. The first thing for him to do was to call the family priest so that he could, in conformity with the custom, make out a horoscope from the given time. Kalu walked across to the house of Hardyal, the Pandit, who was still in the midst of his morning adorations. However, it was not long before he arrived at Kalu's house where he was received with much eagerness and had a

²Another date simultaneously current coincides with the full moon of the month of Katik, October-November, and the birthday of Guru Nanak is in fact celebrated everywhere on this day. This date derives from the later Janamsakhis, including that of Bhai Bala. The earlier ones such as *Puratan* and *Meharban* give the April date. So do the Janamsakhi by Bhai Mani Singh and *Mahima Prakash*. Even books such as Santokh Singh's *Nanak Prakash* supporting Katik Purnima give the age of the Guru at his death as 70 years, 5 months and 7 days, which worked backwards brings the date of his birth to mid-April. The point was cogently laboured by Karam Singh in his book *Katik ke Baisakh* ("November or April"), published in 1912. Almost every book on Guru Nanak since accepts the Baisakh or April date, but the tradition of observing the birthday in Katik, or October-November, howsoever it originated, continues.

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cushioned seat laid out for him. Sprinkling the lengthy scroll of paper with saffron water, he sketched on it the stellar configuration governing the child's birth. He was, says *Bala Janamsakhi*, greatly impressed and wished to know if the midwife had seen any signs. Daultan, the Muslim midwife who was called to speak with him, said that there were many children born under her care, but none so extraordinary as Kalu's son. She described his first cry as resembling the laughter of a grown-up person and expressed her utter amazement at the portents she had witnessed. This only confirmed Pandit Hardyál's own reckoning. He asked to see the child. The mother's solicitous protest was overruled by his insistence and his assurance that the exposure would do no harm to the new-born babe. As the child was brought out in his swaddling clothes, the Pandit, says the *Janamsakhi*, homaged him with folded hands and told Kalu that his son would sit under canopy. He further spoke, "Both Hindus and Turks will reverence him; his name will become current on earth and in heaven. The ocean will give him the way; so will the earth and skies. He will worship and acknowledge but One Formless Lord and teach others to do so . . . Every creature he will consider as God's creation. O Kalu, this will be my grief that I may not live to see the glory that will be his. Who knows how long I live?"³ He promised to return on the thirteenth day to give the child his name and then left uttering many felicitations and blessings.

As the news of Kalu's having a son spread, people from the village—friends and relations, Hindus and Muslims—flocked to Kalu's house to congratulate him. The grateful father received them hospitably and, in keeping with the custom, had sweets sent to their homes and distributed clothes and food among the poor. The village minstrels who

³*Bala*, p. 6.

came to his door singing songs and intoning in poetry the child's genealogy were given liberal charity. On the sixth day, when the mother had had the ceremonial bath, was held the customary feast to which were invited men of the Bedi clan and other friends and dignitaries.

In graceful Punjabi periods, *Meharban Janamsakhi* gives a dramatic account of the child's development. "When he was one month of age, he could focus his gaze and, if father, mother or the midwife called out, he would look stably in that direction. When he was two or three months old, he could hold his neck. When he was four, he was given a pelisse to wear and a cradle to lie in. When five, he learned to coo joyously to himself . . . When he was six months old, he lisped agreeably if anyone spoke to him. At seven, he could sit up. And he sat yogi-like with his legs drawn underneath him. A seven-month-old child—and look, how he sits! The parents felt anxious lest his legs become curved. If they unlocked the cross he would keep the legs straight only as long as they held him in their hands and took to his wonted bearing again when left alone. When he was eight months old, he started creeping on one knee; when nine, on both. When he was ten months old, he could crawl and stand on his feet. At twelve months, he learned to toddle and started babbling 'Ba-ba, Ma-ma.' When he was a year and a half, he prattled freely. When two, he started playing with other children of his age . . ."⁴ A sport he enjoyed was "to gather up old family ledgers and papers into a sheaf and wrap them over in handsome cloth."⁵ He would walk carrying it under his arm or seem to read from it to his companions.

Nanak was the child's name now. The family priest

⁴Pp. 10–11.

⁵*Mani Singh*, p. 39.

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Hardyal prophesied at the time of the ceremony that, just as the name Nanak was common to Hindus and Muslims, the child, when grown-up, would not distinguish the two. From "Nanak," the village of Talwandi became for succeeding generations "Nankana," with the Arabic honorific of *Sahib*, meaning Great, added to it.

The village of Talwandi was small in circumference, with the Rai's *haveli* towering over the low-roofed *kutcha* houses. Its narrow and dusty lanes quickly merged into the surrounding country of stunted bush-jungle and sand and, near the village wells, of patches of cultivated green. The flat tract of land stretched far up to the horizon broken occasionally by the tall heaps of earth which were the remnants of towns once pulsating with life. The village was but a tiny oasis amid this wilderness of raw nature. The landscape changed hue with the seasons which here brought the greatest extremes of climate anywhere in the Punjab. In winter, the morning broke with a touch of frost on bramble and brushwood. The sun shone from transparently azure skies softening somewhat the rigour of the cold and flooding the atmosphere with a sheen of palpable blue. In the longer months of summer, the days were scorching and sultry. Spasms of black dust arose and danced across the desolate plain making the air thick and gritty with powdered dirt. When it was calm, the heat waves ascended visibly from the sandy soil in the blinding midday sun. The winter was followed by a brief spring when the desert shrub burst into flower and field-crops of wheat and gram started turning a mellow gold. It was preceded by the season of rains when the dried earth was quickened with signs of new life, the *rakhs*, or pasture-lands, were overrun with dense grass and serpents and insects had a freedom which was not otherwise theirs.

In this wild open spaces of the *bar*, as this country is

called, Nanak played and dreamed and grew to an aesthetic awareness of its changing aspect and mood. He acquired from it a feeling of spiritual enlargement and joy, of wonderment and solitude. The birds and beasts, sounds and fragrances, successive seasons and vegetation and trees and bush such as *jand*, *van* or *pilu*⁶ (*salvadors oleoides*) and *karir*, the leafless caper, became part of his poetic intuition. He drew upon these in later years for his imagery to express his transcendental vision and to communicate the message he had to deliver. One concrete symbol which must have dominated child Nanak's imagination was the mighty ruined mound on the outskirts of the village—to this day the most prominent feature of its skyline. Like other children, Nanak must have gone up to it for curiosity's sake and for play, but not without a sense of awe and mystery.

Nanak loved to play with the village children of his age and to share with them his sweets and playthings. His mother liked him for this and always invited his playmates to the hospitality of her simple home. But his father usually disapproved and thought his son to be wasteful. Sometimes Nanak abstracted himself from play and became lost within himself. To elders he spoke with humility and wisdom—qualities considered surprising in one so young. His presence seemed to fill the entire village. To quote from *Meharban Janamsakhi*, "A Hindu chancing to pass by would involuntarily exclaim, 'Great is Gobind, the Lord! Such a small child and yet he speaks so auspiciously. His words are as immaculate as he is handsome. He is the image of God Himself.' And if a Turk saw him, he would

⁶This area has been the land of *pilu* since ancient times. In the *Mahabharata* are mentioned its "pleasant paths through *pilu* forest (*sami-pilu kariranam vaneshu sukhavartmasu*)."
Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, p. 184.

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remark with equal enthusiasm, 'Wonderful is Thy creation, Merciful Master! How good-looking is the child and how polite his speech! Talking to him brings one such satisfaction. He is a noble one blessed of the Almighty Allah.'"⁷

⁷P. 11.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEACHING BY HOLY SONG

FATHER Kalu had worldly ambitions for his only son. He wished that he should learn how to read and write and one day take his own place as the revenue superintendent of the village. So when Nanak was seven, he had to prepare to go to school. The Pandit was consulted about the day most favourable for him to begin. On the day thus appointed, Kalu hopefully led his son to teacher Gopal who kept a small school for the village children. He carried with him, on a tray, betel-nut, rice and sugar, and a silver rupee as presents for the master. The latter felt happy to have with him a boy so well spoken of in the village and gave him a place among his pupils seated in a row reverentially on the ground in front of him. On a wooden slate he wrote down the first few letters of the alphabet and gave it to Nanak to learn from.

In the evening when Nanak returned home, Mother Tripta, along with Sister Nanaki, stood waiting for him at the door. Their sense of elation gave way to uneasiness when they espied on his face a look of thoughtfulness such as he was wont to exhibit in his moments of loneliness. Yet they asked him no questions and treated him with the affection which they alone could bestow upon him. Next morning, the mother gave him an early bath and a new suit of clothes to wear before sending him off to school.

At school one day Nanak filled both sides of the slate with a composition written in his own hand. The teacher,

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who did not expect from a pupil of his standing more than a few turns of calligraphy, was surprised to see Nanak's tablet. Curious to know what the child had written, he asked him to read it aloud. To his amazement, it turned out to be a poem in Punjabi, a kind of acrostic which Nanak had extemporized with verses written to match the letters of the alphabet.¹ In it he had reflected upon questions far beyond his years. The main one he seemed to have in mind was, "Who is truly learned?" Certainly not one who knew the letters of the alphabet, but "he who arrives at true understanding through these." "Such a one shall not be liable to render any accounts . . . He who unravels divine knowledge is the real *pandit* The One Lord who created the world is the Lord of all that exists. Fortunate is their advent into the world who love and serve Him. Ignorant is the mind that forgets Him. When thou art able to square thine account, wilt thou be adjudged learned, brother! . . . Comfort pervades the hearts of those whose minds are attached to God's feet. They whose minds are so attached are saved, O Lord, and obtain happiness by Thy grace." Through many such stanzas of smooth metrical structure ran this mood of pious contemplation. Nanak's precocious genius for poetry and revelation was acknowledged by Pandha Gopal, the schoolmaster, who considered himself fortunate in having been instructed by his pupil so marvellously gifted. For his other pupils the incident

¹According to this story, the acrostic would be the first of Guru Nanak's extensive compositions which have been transmitted in the original and are preserved in the Guru Granth, the Sikh Scripture. It is included in *Rag Asa* (p. 432) with the explanatory note *Patti Likhi*, i.e., "thus was the tablet written." The hymn is characteristic of the style in which Guru Nanak afterwards conveyed most of his teaching. As for the manner of composition, the Guru subsequently stated that he spoke only as he was directed. "I utter what He commands me to say," read one of his verses. In another hymn he said, "As the word of the Master comes to me so do I deliver it."

was wholly baffling.

The teacher was still optimistic that Nanak would learn to compute, post ledgers and strike balances so as to be able to adopt his father's vocation. He kept pressing the point upon him. But Nanak's thoughts lay elsewhere. He decided to leave the school, but composed for the teacher another hymn before doing so. He sang :

Make thy ink by burning up worldly attachment
and pounding the ashes to powder;
Let pure mind be thy paper.
Make love thy pen, and thy heart the writer,
and write as thy Guru instructs.
Write thou His name and His praises.
Write that He is without limit
and fathomless.
This is the writing, this the account
one ought to learn.
This will be one's true credit
here and hereafter.*

Father Kalu was dismayed to see his son come home without mastering the ancestral skill. But he had not given up hope and wished to try him yet with Pandit Brijnath Shastri, the village scholar of classical lore. He thought it might be more in accord with the child's inclinations to read with him the religious texts. So Nanak was taken to the Pandit who was pleased to accept him as his pupil. From him he learned Sanskrit, but did not stay long enough to build upon it a worldly career. His own inner compulsions were dictating a course unamenable to any conventional scheme. There was in Talwandi still another school, the *maktab*, maintained by a Muslim Maulvi, Qutb-ud-Din by name, and it was now Nanak's turn to go there to learn Persian and Arabic. He gained proficiency in both in a

*Guru Granth, Sri, p. 16.

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short time and astonished the teacher by his native endowment. According to *Meharban Janamsakhi*, "the Maulvi would often say, 'Praise be to the Lord of the Worlds! Such easy facility with the Persian language . . . I have not seen in anyone this kind of intelligence. He has been favoured by God Himself . . . He is a blessed one . . . he grasps instantly what he hears once . . .'"³ It is said that Nanak also composed a spiritually inspired acrostic on the Persian characters, from Alif on. The text is contained in some of the biographies, but not in the *Guru Granth*.

Between these school years, there occurred in Nanak's home two important events. One was the marriage of his sister Nanaki, then 13 years of age, and the other the *Rajnopavitam*, or the ceremony of the sacred thread, for him. Nanak was still going to Pandha Gopal's school when Jairam, who was an employee of Nawab Daulat Khan, the Lodhi governor of Sultanpur, came to Talwandi on an official visit. The village was within the Nawab's dominion and every year he sent his officer to collect the revenue from the Bhattis. Jairam combined with his official status a well-bred civil manner and was for this reason treated with more than common courtesy by Rai Bular, the local Bhatti chief. Their mutual confidence grew to such a degree that Jairam, himself of Kashatriya lineage, spoke one day with his host about the possibility of his marrying into one of the families of this caste of which there were so many in Talwandi. Rai Bular could think of no family worthier than that of Father Kalu's for a young man of Jairam's qualities and talents. He immediately conveyed the suggestion to Kalu and strongly urged the merits of Jairam for receiving the hand of his daughter Nanaki. He told him that Nanaki was like his own daughter and that he would

³P. 16.

not have put forward the proposal unless he was convinced of its suitableness. Father Kalu, who was favourably impressed by what he had heard about the boy and his family, returned home to consult with his wife and brother. Approval was given as readily as he had expected, and he proceeded to make offerings of money and sweets to Jairam and pledge his daughter's hand to him. The following year Jairam brought to Talwandi the wedding-party and the nuptials took place at Kalu's house amid much rejoicing and ceremony. Rai Bular gave presents to the bride and the bridegroom as did other friends of the family, Hindus and Muslims.

For Nanak the occasion was one of deep tenderness. His sister was the person from whom he had received the greatest understanding and affection. She was, in fact, the first to be vouchsafed the realization of his true genius—a discovery she immensely rejoiced in and hugged closely to her heart. As was then the practice, she did, after the wedding, make prolonged visits to her parents, but for Nanak it was not the same home again after his sister had been married. Jairam himself regarded Nanak with high esteem, though in the scale of relationship it was always the sister's husband who came first and was entitled to every consideration and respect. Nanak, on his own side, always showed perfect attention and deference towards Jairam. His unfailing observance of the social proprieties towards his brother-in-law was indeed touching.

As Nanak entered his eleventh year, he had attained the age when he must, according to the prescribed usage, be given the *janeu*, or the sacrificial thread, to wear. This cord-hoop woven out of cotton and ceremonially sanctified is worn round the neck and slung over the shoulder by Hindus of the upper strata to mark them off from the low-caste Shudras. Father Kalu had made elaborate arrange-

ments for Nanak's investiture and invited to his house a large number of friends and relations. Pandit Hardyal, the family priest, came and sat on a specially built platform purified by cow-dung plaster. He burnt lamps and incense, drew figures with flour-chalk in front of him and chanted the ancient *mantras*, or hymns, over the cotton-yarn cocoon he had brought with him. After he had gone through the initial rites, he proceeded to place the cord across the shoulder of Nanak who sat facing him. But the latter interrupted him to ask what he was doing with the yarn.

"This is the sacred thread. I am investing you with this badge of the twice-born," answered the Pandit.

"How can you differentiate between men by such badges? It is their actions that should categorize them. I will not take a badge like this. Besides, this thread will get soiled and break," said Nanak.

These were the strangest words Pandit Hardyal had ever heard and he least expected to hear these from the child for whom he had predicted so favourably. He tried to persuade him and told him that he was a Kashatriya, born of Kashatriya parents, and that it was only right for him to wear the *janeu* like all of his ancestors had done. But Nanak saw no use for the thread and refused to wear it. Addressing Pandit Hardyal, he recited spontaneously the following hymn :

Let compassion be thy cotton !
Spin it into the yarn of contentment ;
Give it knots of continence
and the twist of truth.
Thus wilt thou make a *janeu* for the soul.
If such a one thou hast,
put it on me.
The thread so made will neither snap,
nor become soiled.

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It will neither be burned nor lost.
Blest is the man, O Nanak,
who weareth such a thread around his neck!¹⁴

The Pandit stepped down from the platform and the assembly dissolved. Everyone was in a state of shock, for no one had witnessed or heard of such a thing happening before. Nanak was known to be a retiring, soft-spoken boy. None could have imagined him capable of such force of will as to discard an old custom sanctioned both by tradition and religion. For days afterwards, people talked of nothing but what had happened at Father Kalu's house. Many said that his son had disgraced the family.

¹⁴Guru Granth, *Asa*, p. 471.

CHAPTER V

THE BOYHOOD OCCUPATIONS

NANAK's father was becoming increasingly disquieted. For him, as for everyone else he knew, life took a well-defined, charted course. Happiness and sorrow were determined by one's Karma, or deeds done in previous lives, one's duties pertaining to different stages or events in one's career by ancient texts and usage, and one's profession by the family into which one was born. Nanak, who came of a family which belonged to the second of the four Hindu castes and had an established ancestral vocation, had everything already decided for him only if he would be less protesting. His unwillingness to take to any settled order made the father anxious for his future. The Janam-sakhis record long discourses between father and son in which the latter, in verse of deep piety and sublimity, gave expression to his trust in the Transcendent. In homely simile and metaphor, he described the occupation he prized above all others. He extemporized several *shabads*. In one of these, he said :

Make body the field, the mind the ploughman,
honest labour the irrigating water.
Sow the seed of the Lord's Name.
Let contentment be the leveller, and humility the fence.
With deeds of love the seed will fertilize.

* * * * *

Make this frail body thy shop
and stock it with the merchandise of True Name.

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He is a successful dealer in horses
who breeds the horses of truth.
And carries with him the haversack of virtues
as foodstock for the journey.¹

All available evidence supports the fact that Nanak took out to pasture the domestic herd as bidden by the father. In that mute company and in the spaciousness that lay around him, he often fell into a reverie and was absorbed in prayer. These moments of undisturbed harmony with nature and with his own soul were of the deepest significance in those early years of his life. On the outskirts of the village, he also sometimes had the opportunity of meeting with the saintly recluses who strayed from long distances into a favourite wooded haunt close by. He listened attentively to the zealous expositions of their esoteric faiths and became familiar with the beliefs and practices of many different sects and orders. His knowledge of Sufi lore is traced to his early contact with a Muslim scholar and dervish Sayyid Hasan.²

About Nanak, the herdsman, several miraculous stories became current in Talwandi. Two of these are related in all Janamsakhis with varying detail.

As Nanak was herding his buffaloes one day, he sat on the ground near them and became rapt in his meditations. The buffaloes broke into a neighbour's field sown with wheat and browsed through it. The owner who chanced upon that scene of devastation was beside himself with rage. From his end of the field he started shouting for whoever had let his cattle ruin his wheat. Nanak's heart was filled with pity to see what had happened. He tried to pacify the wrathful Bhatti proprietor and said that God would put

¹Guru Granth, *Sorath*, p. 595.

²He has been described as one of Guru Nanak's village teachers in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, a Persian work by Ghulam Husain Khan.

a blessing on his field. But the man was not appeased and he charged Nanak with having laid waste his crop. He insisted on taking him to Rai Bular, the village chief, for justice. In tones inconsolable he complained to the Rai, "I am ruined, Sir! My crop is destroyed. I am robbed. Procure me justice. If not, I go to the Turks."

Rai Bular was sorry to see Nanak being arraigned thus and sent for Father Kalu. He told him what he had heard and said that he would forgive the trespass, but the aggrieved farmer must be compensated. Footmen were sent to estimate the loss. On their return they reported that they had seen no damage done to the crop. Not a blade had been injured and "the field seemed to proclaim that if any damage had been done it must be elsewhere."³ Everyone was surprised, but most of all the complainant. He humbly told Rai Bular that he was no liar. He had seen with his own eyes the whole crop ruined and the buffaloes sitting amidst it after they had heartily gorged themselves on it. He said that he did not know what God's miracle had taken place afterwards.

There is in Nankana Sahib a shrine built in the field known as Kiara Sahib, or the Holy Stretch.

While out with his herd on another occasion, Nanak lay down to rest under a tree in the summer afternoon and fell asleep. This was the time when the ripened crops ready for harvest were assessed for taxation. Rai Bular was returning home with his servants after the day's work of field-measurements. When he came near the tree under which slept the weary herdsman, he suddenly reined in his horse and stopped. He thought he had seen a strange phenomenon. The shadows of other trees had travelled round with the sun, but not of the tree in front of which his horse stood. Rai Bular asked the servants to find out who

³*Meharban*, p. 23.

slept under the tree. He was told that it was Kalu Bedi's son Nanak. So saying the servants raised the sleeper. Nanak joining his hands saluted Rai Bular. The latter alighted from his horse, embraced Nanak and kissed him on his forehead. He said to his companions, "Nanak is not empty. On him rests God's favour. Today we have seen another wonderful thing. Watch the Lord's marvel! The shade of this tree remains stationary for the blessed one. He is no ordinary mortal. Praise be to the Almighty Master!"⁴ Rai Bular did not mount his horse again, but walked home instead. He called Father Kalu and said to him, "Your son is a great man. He is the honour of my town. Kalu, thou hast become exalted and I am also exalted, in whose town such a one has been born."⁵ Father Kalu said, "Of the things of God, God alone knows."⁶

An ancient gnarled *van*-tree which is said to be the one that protected the Guru with its immobile shadow is preserved in the precincts of another Gurdwara in Nankana Sahib.⁷

Nanak was now about 16 years of age. He stayed most of the time out of doors tending his herd of cattle, consorting with wayfaring sadhus and devoting his solitude to inward communion. The family were reconciled to his ways, with the exception of Father Kalu who still believed that the most profitable course for his son would have been to follow in his footsteps. The villagers pictured him as an unusual boy, and the most taken of all with him was Rai Bular himself.

⁴*Puratan*, p. 9.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷Another story, equally popular, is that of a cobra spreading its hood over the face of sleeping Nanak to protect it from the rays of the midday sun. Rai Bular was again the witness. *Bala* has this story, but not *Puratan* and *Meharban*.

THE BOYHOOD OCCUPATIONS

Then suddenly a change came upon Nanak. He grew silent and became immersed in his own thoughts more than ever before. He did not wish to stir out of his home; he ate and drank but little and lay in bed all the time. It was like this for four or five days. The parents were grieved and the neighbours rumoured that something had happened to Nanak. Mother Tripta, who had in a loving way always seen a purpose in whatever her son did and never raised a doubt or question, wondered what could have been the matter. She was pained to hear the remarks of the neighbours and, one day when she saw a group of anchorites pass along the street, she felt a sudden twinge in her heart. She hurriedly went to where Nanak was and spoke to him, "Son, I have seen some mendicants, perhaps on their way to far-off places of pilgrimage. I feared my own Nanak might not take the same route one day. Like them he might go away to visit the hallowed spots. Son, my heart is restless. I say they left their mothers behind and likewise Nanak will go, too, leaving his mother to her loneliness."⁸

Nanak here uttered a hymn in which he said that he did not need to make any such journeys. He had turned his own heart into a temple and that was the object of his pilgrimage.

The mother was anxious to see her son get up and eat and drink. She pleaded with him to do so and "go about in the lanes and streets so that people might be reassured of his health and say that her son had become well again."

Nanak's condition remained unchanged and, as *Puratan Janamsakhi* says, "he did neither eat nor drink for three months. The whole clan of the Bedis became sad. They asked Kalu how he could sit down quietly when his son lay ill. He must call some physician and give him the medi-

⁸ *Meharban*, p. 61.

cine. A little thing can sometimes save much.”⁹ Both Father Kalu and his brother Lalu had spared themselves nothing to comply with advice from wherever it came. They had called in the Muslim Mullah credited with the power of casting out spirits. The Mullah had mumbled many incantations and drawn up amulets, but Nanak had asked how they could help others who “wrote out God’s name on slips of paper to sell it.” The father now brought Hardas, the physician. Hardas held Nanak’s wrist within his fingers and began to feel the pulse under them to diagnose the malady. Nanak told him that the sickness was not of the body and broke into the following *shabad* :

They have called the physician to try his physic;
And he grips the arm and searches it for ailment.
Little doth the good physician know
That the ache is in the heart.¹⁰

The physician, a wise old man, understood what Nanak meant and assured Kalu that his son needed no healing. He was himself free from infirmity and “might well a healer be for others,” he said.¹¹

The mood resolved itself in Nanak’s reverting to his usual manner. It cheered the hearts of the parents to see him risen from bed and going to his work. With a view to further diverting his mind and providing him with a permanent vocation, Father Kalu one day counted out to him twenty silver rupees and asked him to invest the sum usefully. He advised him to go to the neighbouring market-town of Chuharkana and purchase goods which he could

⁹Pp. 12-13.

¹⁰Guru Granth, *Var Malar*, p. 1279.

¹¹*Puratan*, p. 14.

THE BOYHOOD OCCUPATIONS

sell at a profit. He was given an assistant called Bala,¹² of the clan of the Sandhu *jats*, to go with him. Father Kalu accompanied his son a good part of the way and, as they went, he urged upon him to make a truly good bargain. Walking homewards after bidding Nanak goodbye and giving him his blessing, "he kept turning his head to look fondly in his direction," as he proceeded on his first journey out of the village.

In a jungle that lay on the way, Nanak fell in with a large party of bare-skinned sadhus in different postures of penance. Some of them sat with their arms upraised, some kept standing. Some sat in front of burning fires, some in water. Some read the holy texts, some kept their lips sealed. Nanak tarried to converse with them and asked their chief, the *mahant*, who sat cross-legged on a deer-skin apart from the rest, "Why, Sir, don't you wear any clothes? Don't you have any or are they displeasing to you?" Bala, uneasy at this digression, reminded Nanak of the purpose of their journey and of the distance they still had to go. But Nanak calmly waited to hear what the *mahant* had to say. "We are Nirbanis," came the answer "It only befits us to abstain from clothes . . . We eat, young lad, only when the Lord sends."¹³

Nanak discovered that the sadhus had been without food for several days. He felt distressed and thought he had come by as good a bargain as he could strike anywhere with money his father had given him. He marched on to the town of Chuharkana, and, in spite of the protest of his companion, spent there the entire sum on provisions for the hungry men in the forest. With supplies of wheat-

¹²To him is ascribed the *Janamsakhi* known as Bala's. It is said to have been written at his dictation by a scribe in front of Guru Angad, second in spiritual succession to Guru Nanak.

¹³Bala, p. 33.

flour, sugar and *ghee* he hurried back to the spot where he had left them.

On emerging from the jungle, Nanak asked his companion what they had done. Bala spoke immediately disclaiming all responsibility and plainly told him that he had wasted the money despite his warnings. If Father Kalu was now angry, he must tell him whose fault it was. Instead of going home in the evening, Nanak stopped outside the village.

Father Kalu was angry to learn what his son had done with the money and came with Bala to where he was. He spoke to him in the harshest terms and would have done more but for Nanaki who came running behind him to intercede for her brother. As much concerned as the sister was Rai Bular who sent for Father Kalu when he heard of the incident. He entreated him to be patient with Nanak and to try to see the uniqueness that was in him. The Rai even offered to compensate the monetary loss and defray all expenses on his son's account. He said that "he would keep Guru Nanak in his own home, but it was a pity that he could not."¹⁴

¹⁴*Bala*, pp. 36-37. The implication is that the hospitality of Rai Bular, who was a Muslim, would not be acceptable to one coming of a high-caste Hindu family. But Guru Nanak, who had already repudiated the ritualistic wearing of the sacred thread, did not recognize caste or the kind of restriction Rai Bular seemed to have in mind.

CHAPTER VI

“THERE IS NO HINDU AND THERE IS NO MUSALMAN”

NANAK had not much longer to stay in Talwandi. A messenger arrived from Sultanpur with letters for him and Father Kalu. Jairam had invited Nanak to visit him and urged his father-in-law to allow him to make the journey. It was not the custom—the orthodox families still honour the rule—for the kin of a married girl to go and stay in her house. The elder brothers and parents always entertain her in their home and make presents to her. But they may never partake of her hospitality. A younger brother may be her guest only for short intervals. Nanak, younger in years than his sister, was so impressed by the affectionate tone of the invitation sent by his brother-in-law that he decided to join him in Sultanpur.

The father was not averse to the proposal; in fact, he thought that the change would be good for him. He consulted with Rai Bular who also expressed his approval, though with regret at Nanak's going away from his village, however briefly. Wholly unreconciled was Mother Tripta who carried a pang in her heart as she made things ready for her son's journey. She specially prepared sweetened bread to last him and Bala, his escort, through the days of travel. Rai Bular supplied the provisions for a banquet and, as Nanak was leaving, he, Father Kalu, Lalu, and his friends and companions with whom he had played and shared his innermost thoughts and fervour turned out to

bid him farewell. Humblest but dearest of all was Mardana,¹ the Muslim *dum*, one of the tribe of professional musician-drummers, who used to accompany Nanak on the instrument when he sang verses in praise of Akal, the Timeless Creator. The farewell, more elaborate than Nanak would have liked, became very touching—more so in retrospect, for he never came to his village again for more than a passing visit.

Travelling to the north-east, Nanak crossed the river Ravi. He must have then stood in front of the mighty red-brick gateway of Lahore and passed through its busy streets unknown and unmarked along with his companion Bala. He travelled further east to the Beas which was ferried over near Goindwal. He was now in the Jullundur Doab, between the rivers Sutlej and Beas, close to Sultanpur which was the seat of the Lodhi satrap, Nawab Daulat Khan. The Nawab, a relation of the Delhi sovereign, was a powerful ruler and played a critical role in Indian history on the eve of the Mughal invasions. He had rebuilt Sultanpur on an ancient Buddhist site and spent his resources lavishly to beautify it with gardens, pavilions and magnificent courtly buildings. He was a patron of learning and many Muslim scholars and theologians came to live in the city during his time. They set up schools which became so famous over the years that

¹Mardana was Guru Nanak's companion throughout his extensive journeys across the country and abroad, but most of the biographies do not mention his name until after the Guru had left Talwandi for Sultanpur. It, however, seems unlikely that Guru Nanak should not have made his acquaintance in his own village. At least one authority, i.e., *Prachin Panth Prakash* (p. 9), by Ratan Singh Bhangu, lends support to the assumption and says that, as a small boy, Guru Nanak gave Mardana a stringed instrument improvised from reeds to play on while he sang the hymns. In *Meharban* (p. 73), Mardana is mentioned as accompanying Guru Nanak when he leaves Talwandi for Sultanpur. He is described there as the Guru's companion from his childhood days and as one who sang to him songs from Kabir, Trilochan, Ravidas, Dhanna and Beni.

several of the Mughal princes, including Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, were sent to Sultanpur for their education and training.

Nanak reached Sultanpur five days after leaving Talwandi travelling nearly a hundred miles. Sister Nanaki had been ardently awaiting his arrival for many days with her eyes constantly turning to the door as she did the household chores. Now when she had her vision fulfilled and saw her brother step inside the courtyard, she was beside herself with joy. She ran to touch in reverence his feet dusty from the journey. But the brother stopped her saying that, since she was the elder of the two, it was his duty to make her the obeisance. Nanaki, says *Bala Janamsakhi*, replied, "This would be true if thou wert an earthly being."² She put down a cot for him and Bala and began to enquire of them about the journey, her parents and Talwandi. Meanwhile, Jairam came home and then took place another warm-hearted exchange of mutual courtesies. Nanaki laid out the meal which was eaten gratefully amid homely repose and tranquillity.

Jairam held a position of trust in the court of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi. One day he offered to introduce Nanak to the Nawab and seek employment for him. Nanak who did not wish to remain in his sister's house without doing any work showed his ready willingness. Both went to call on the Nawab. Daulat Khan was struck by Nanak's gentle appearance and decided forthwith to entrust to him charge of his granaries and stores. Jairam felt very happy at this outcome of their meeting with the Nawab and considered it yet another mark of his confidence in him.

Renunciation had never been Nanak's aim; yet his inability to conform to any conventional occupation had

²P. 42.

been the cause of concern to the family. Everyone was now surprised at the assiduousness with which he applied himself to the duties of his office in the commissariat. For Nanak there was nothing unusual in this because, as he himself affirmed in one of his verses, "the secret of religion lay in living in the world without being overcome by it." The Janamsakhis describe, in exemplification, his daily programme at Sultanpur. He arose a watch before day-break and walked to the rivulet called Bein which enclosed the town on the north-west. He bathed in its night-cooled still waters and remained absorbed in the presence of the Boundless Being contemplating upon His Name. Such repetition or remembrance of the Divine Name was his constant practice and became a means of devotion for those who followed him. The jujube-tree under which he sat is still to be seen on the margin of the Bein flowing limpidly along its well-worn course as it did five centuries ago.

The day was spent in the *modikhana*, or the stores. In those times land taxes were paid to government in kind. The salaries and allowances of civil and military employees were in turn partly paid in goods. These transactions were conducted in the *modikhana* and Nanak carried out diligently the responsibility he had undertaken. Whoever came to him was gratified by his kindness of heart. The poor and the lowly were the first to receive his attention. Even in work his thoughts remained with God. While weighing out rations one day, he was so entranced with the utterance of the figure *tera*, or thirteen, which is also the Punjabi equivalent of the word "thine" that he kept repeating it—*tera, tera*, (Thine, Thine, all is Thine, O Lord!)—and dealing out the provisions. Bala whom he had detained from going back to Talwandi was one of his helpers. Both returned in the evening to a simple meal at the house

Nanak had hired separately from his sister's. It was now time for prayer and reciting hymns in praise of God, an activity which went on far into the night. In the small, but expanding group, was Mardana, Nanak's boyhood companion, who had been sent by Father Kalu to bring him reports of his son but had stayed on never to part company with him again.

Nanaki's only ambition at this time was to see her brother get married. Her husband had already been in touch with Mulchand, of the Chona sub-caste of the Kashatriyas, who had a daughter of marriageable age. He looked after the lands of the Randhawa *jats* of the village of Pakhoke and lived in the nearby town of Batala. He had been to Sultanpur to see Nanak and had given his consent telling Jairam that his family would deem itself exalted by the alliance. Jairam had only to obtain the approval of Father Kalu who happened to come to Sultanpur soon afterwards to assure himself of his son's wellbeing. The first discovery he made was disenchanting for him : in spite of having been in the Nawab's employment, Nanak had laid by no money. Most of what he got he gave away to the needy or was reimbursed to the stores because of his bountiful dealings. His father would have held it against him more obstreperously than he did if Jairam had not brought up the suggestion about matrimony. This news he greeted as most opportune and gave the proposal his instant blessings.

Nanak was nineteen³ when the marriage took place.

³No two accounts agree on this point. The *Puratan Janamsakhi* and *Meharban Janamsakhi* place the event during Guru Nanak's years in Talwandi, the former when he was twelve and the latter when he was fifteen or sixteen. But *Meharban* extends Guru Nanak's stay in Talwandi until he was upwards of 35. This exceeds the generally accepted date by seventeen years and, if followed, will clash with several historically ascertainable facts. Bhai Bala's *Janamsakhi* and *Nanak Prakash* place the marriage during Guru Nanak's Talwandi days which fits in more aptly with the concurrent phase of his life. Macauliffe, while rejecting the Sultanpur

Father Kalu, resolved to bring *eclat* to the occasion, arrived with a large number of friends and kinsmen from Talwandi. Bala's *Janamsakhi* mentions names such as those of Lalu, his brother, Indersain, Firanda, Jagatmall, Lalchand, Jagatrai and Jatmall. Rai Bular sent through Kalu his love and felicitations for Nanak. From Chahalwala came Kalu's father-in-law Rama, with his son Kishna and other relations. Thus was the wedding party formed in Sultanpur, with Jairam's father, Parmanand, acting as master of ceremonies. Nanak took leave of Nanaki amidst a profusion of sisterly benedictions and ritual and the party started on horseback and by cart for the bride's home in Batala. The journey took them five days. For three days they were the guests of Mulchand who offered liberal entertainment. On the spot where the wedding ceremony was held now stands a shrine and the day is observed annually as a festival in the month of August. The bride's family laid out presents for the bridegroom, his parents and relations and other guests.

The bride Sulakhni, gentle and virtuous, was thus fortunately espoused. Yet even in her life there were to be trials and travail issuing from the prolonged separations she had to endure after Guru Nanak set foot on his journeys. Her sacrifice and the patience with which she bore her sufferings lend nobility to her character. Her best consola-

theory, argues that, if the marriage had not been made for him at an early age, he would not have married at all. It is not so easily determined that, left to himself, Guru Nanak would have chosen the path of celibacy. If he had wished to, he could have said no to his parents even as he did when he was given the *janeu* to wear. According to *Bhai Mani Singh Janamsakhi*, Guru Nanak was married at the age of fourteen. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (*A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 4) put it at 18 and Teja Singh (*Mahan Kavi Guru Nanak*, p. 14) at 19. Khushwant Singh (*A History of the Sikhs*) reconciles, as it were, the two broad versions by accepting the *Puratan* statement about Guru Nanak marrying at the age of twelve and mentioning his wife as coming to stay with him at Sultanpur when he was nineteen.

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tion was derived from the affection she consistently had from Sister Nanaki. Her own parents only aggravated her unhappiness by their rough temper and their readiness to speak offensively to their son-in-law. However, Guru Nanak had yet to be in Sultanpur for some years and Sulakhni set up a happy and hospitable home and cooked for all who came to join in singing God's glory by night.

In Sultanpur were born both of Guru Nanak's children—the elder son Srichand in 1494 and the younger Lakhmidas in 1496.⁴ The former was of an austere turn of mind and excluded himself from mundane matters. He is known to history as founder of the ascetic order of the Udasis. Lakhmidas married and raised a family which flourished and has its off-shoots scattered in several parts of the Punjab.

A group of disciples attached to Guru Nanak's simple way of prayer and honest practice had come into being in Sultanpur. The old biographies do not record many names, but an exception popularly made is in favour of one Bhagirath who lived in the neighbouring village of Malsian. In his quest for spiritual consolation, he had served faqirs and sadhus and worshipped many gods and goddesses. One night, it is stated, he went to sleep adoring the stone-idol in his room when he had a dream. A voice spoke to him that all his wanderings would cease if he were only to make a trip to Sultanpur and meet there Guru Nanak who was a chosen being but had not till then fully revealed himself.

⁴Kahan Singh, *Mahan Kosh*, p. 188 and p. 791. The *Puratan* and *Meharban* Janamsakhis seem to make out Lakhmidas as the elder while *Bala* and *Mani Singh* explicitly mention Srichand as the first-born of the two—a view which is supported by family tradition and has been commonly accepted. Two of the Janamsakhis state the years of birth. According to *Meharban*, the first son was born when the Guru was twenty-seven (in 1496) and, according to *Bala*, when he was twenty-two (in 1491). On this point, the later tradition as represented by Tara Singh Narotam (*Gur Tirath Sangrah*) and Kahan Singh commands general acceptance. Also see Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, p. 31.

Bhagirath woke up bewildered, but determined to follow the direction. He sought out Guru Nanak at the evening prayer in his home in Sultanpur and felt that he had found whatever he had been in search of. He now spent most of his time mixing with the *sangat*, or holy fellowship, in Sultanpur praying with it and sharing with it a sense of mutual loyalty and assurance.

Guru Nanak sent Bhagirath to Lahore to purchase the dowry for Mardana's daughter who was to be married. He instructed him to stop there no more than a night. Arriving in Lahore, Bhagirath went to a shop where he thought he could buy all of his requirements. Mansukh, the owner of the shop, supplied everything except the ceremonial set of bangles, which, he told him, was always specially made and required at least a week's notice. Bhagirath explained how he must at all costs return the following day in deference to his Guru's command. Mansukh was so fascinated to hear what further Bhagirath had to say about his Master that he gave him the bangles from his own home and travelled in his company to Sultanpur to see him. He turned a disciple and made frequent visits subsequently to partake of the inspiration he had discovered. He reduced to writing some of Guru Nanak's hymns—the first perhaps to be thus recorded—and set up a *sangat* in Lahore to repeat them and to follow the way they taught.

Then rumour started. There were people who felt jealous of Nanak's charities and the influence he had with the Nawab. There were others who resented his equal treatment of all castes and faiths. Complaints were made to the Nawab that Nanak was squandering his stores. When this reached the ears of Nanaki and her husband they felt troubled. Nanaki called her brother to her house and disclosed to him warily what she had heard. Nanak requested the Nawab to have the stores checked. According to *Bala*

Janamsakhi, this was done by his treasurer Jadurai who found the stores full and the accounts correct. Some amount of money was, in fact, reckoned at Nanak's credit. He had this given away in charity.

A point of equalization had been reached in another sense as well. One day Nanak did not return home after his morning ablutions. His clothes were found on the bank of the Bein which led everyone to think that he had been drowned in the river. The news caused gloom in the city and the population turned out on the site to see what had happened. Nawab Daulat Khan himself came and had his fishermen throw nets into the water to search for the body, but in vain. He sighed in grief as he mounted his horse to return to the city, and, in the words of *Puratan Janamsakhi*, muttered to himself, “Nanak was my good minister.”⁵ Jairam and the disciples were in great distress. Only Nanaki remained calm and kept repeating that her brother was unharmed and would come forth among them again. She spoke with such unflinching faith that every heart felt deeply touched.

Nanak did reappear on the third day. The interval had been a crucial mystical experience. The *Janamsakhi* describes it in terms of a direct communion with God. “As the Lord willed, Nanak the devotee, was escorted to His Presence. Then a cup filled with *amrit* (nectar) was given him with the command, ‘Nanak, this is the cup of Name-adoration. Drink it . . . I am with thee and I do bless and exalt thee. Whoever remembers thee will have My favour. Go, rejoice in My name and teach others to do so . . . I have bestowed upon thee the gift of My name. Let this be thy calling.’ Nanak made the salutation and stood up.”⁶

⁵P. 16.

⁶*Puratan*, pp. 16–17.

GURU NANAK

He burst into a song of praise :

Were I to live for millions of years
and could make air my food and drink ;
Were I to seal myself in a cave ceaselessly to meditate
without seeing the sun or the moon and without a wink of sleep ;
I would still not be able to measure Thy greatness,
nor signify the glory of Thy Name!

The Formless One is the eternal, irreplaceable truth,
Attempt not to describe Him by hearsay knowledge.
If it pleases Him, He in His grace will reveal Himself.

Were I to be shredded and ground like grain in a mill;
Were I to be burnt in a fire and dissolved with ashes;
I would still not be able to measure Thy greatness,
nor signify the glory of Thy Name!

Were I to fly like a bird to a hundred heavens;
Were I to vanish from human gaze at will
and could live without food and drink ;
I would still not be able to measure Thy greatness,
nor signify the glory of Thy Name!

Had there been ton upon ton of paper, saith Nanak,
and had I absorbed the wisdom of volumes without count ;
If I had a supply of ink inexhaustible and I could write
with the speed of the wind ;
I would still not be able to measure Thy greatness,
nor signify the glory of Thy Name!⁷

Thereupon, the Voice spoke : "Nanak, thou discerneth
My will." Nanak recited what became the preamble of
the first Sikh prayer, the *Japuji*, which constituted the
core of his doctrine. It read :

There is but one God. He is all that is.
He is the Creator of all things and He is all-pervasive.

⁷Guru Granth, *Sri*, p. 14.

"THERE IS NO HINDU AND THERE IS NO MUSALMAN"

He is without fear and without enmity.
He is timeless, unborn and self-existent.
He is the Enlightener
And can be realized by grace of Himself alone.
He was in the beginning; He was in all ages.
The True One is, was, O Nanak, and shall forever be.

The Voice was heard again : "Who is just in thine eyes, Nanak, shall be so in Mine. He who receiveth thy grace shall abide in Mine. My name is the Supreme Lord; thy name is divine Guru."

"From Heavenly court a robe of honour was conferred upon Guru Nanak."⁸

Then, says the *Janamsakhi*, the order was given to the ministers that they should take Guru Nanak back to the ferry. As he made his appearance on the third day, the citizens questioned one another in amazement, "He had fallen into the river. Whencesoever has he come now?"

Guru Nanak took up abode in the jungle and continued in unbroken silence. When he spoke the following day, the first words he uttered were, "There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman." And he said little else. At the time of his birth the family priest had foretold, "Every creature he will regard as God's creation." The simple formula he now pronounced embodied his cosmic vision and native sympathy for all. But even such an inoffensive statement as this was not unlikely to be cavilled at among people who recognized the divisions as only natural and inevitable. Some said, "He has been affected by the waters of the Bein." Those of the ruling race were specially cross that anyone should equate Hindus with Muslims or say that there existed no Musalman. Accusations were laid before Nawab Daulat Khan, but he dismissed these and made the remark

⁸*Puratan*, p. 18.

that Guru Nanak was a faqir whose words they did not easily understand. The Qazi, expounder of the Muslim law, who was present, supported the complainants and urged the Nawab to summon Guru Nanak. When he came with the footmen who were sent to bring him, the Nawab showed his appreciation by offering him his homage and seating him at his side.

It was now the time for the Muslim afternoon prayer. All arose and went to the mosque. The Guru also accompanied them. As the Qazi conducted the service, the Guru remained standing and did not kneel. This gave the Qazi ground for further complaint and he spoke to the Nawab, "Thou hast seen thyself, Khan, that he did not join the prayer, although he proclaims that there is no difference between the Muslims and the Hindus." "What prayer was I expected to join?" asked the Guru. "The Qazi's own heart was not in the words he was repeating. His mind constantly wandered to his new-born foal which he had loosened in his yard before coming to the mosque. He remembered that there was a well in the enclosure and feared lest the foal should fall into it."

The Qazi admitted that the Guru had spoken truly.

The Guru then recited the following *shabad* :

It is not easy to be called a Musalman :
 If there were one let him be so known.
 He should first take to his heart the tenets of his faith
 and purge himself of all pride.
 He will be a Muslim who pursues the path
 shown by the founder of the creed ;
 who extinguishes anxiety about life and death ;
 who accepts the will of God as supreme ;
 who has faith in the Creator and surrenders
 himself to the Almighty.

“THERE IS NO HINDU AND THERE IS NO MUSALMAN”

When he hath established his goodwill for all, O Nanak,
will he be called a Musalman.⁹

The *Puratan Janamsakhi* records, “When the Guru had uttered this *shabad*, the Sayyids, the sons of Shaikhs, the Mufti, the Nawab, the chiefs and the leaders were all amazed. The Nawab said, ‘Qazi, Nanak hath arrived at the truth. Any further questioning will be futile.’ All the people, Hindus and Musalmans, began to say to the Nawab that God spoke on Nanak’s lips.”¹⁰

⁹Guru Granth, *Var Majh*, p. 141.

¹⁰P. 22.

CHAPTER VII

LALO

GURU Nanak was now ready to go forth into the wider world with the message he felt himself called upon to discharge. The work had been started in Talwandi itself and had continued in Sultanpur, unobtrusively yet definitively, amidst worldly duties. But the time had come when he should temporarily disengage himself from these and give himself up to his special *metier*. Such indeed had been the divine injunction as related in the *Janamsakhi*. Instead of returning home, Guru Nanak retired to the jungle. Efforts were made to wean him from the course he seemed to have set himself. Nawab Daulat Khan entreated him not to leave Sultanpur and, according to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, placed at his disposal "his dominion, property and authority." The Guru's reply was : "May God reward thee! But I may stop here no more. The state, goods and houses will be thine. We must forsake all and go."¹

More embarrassing was the meeting with Mulchand and his wife Chando Rani who had come from Batala bent upon converting their son-in-law on pain of an angry altercation. When they found that sweet persuasion had failed to make Guru Nanak change his mind, they started a violent tirade. Chando Rani who had a lashing tongue was the more reproachful of the two and, as says the *Bala Janamsakhi*, she thundered like lightning. Mulchand also went in

¹P. 22.

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petition to the Nawab. But the Nawab expressed his unwillingness to intervene in the decision of a godly person like Guru Nanak. The tradition also reports the Kaliyug, the spirit of the last and most evilly affected of the four cosmic ages of Hindu calculation, made its appearance before Guru Nanak to tempt him with many worldly offers. But neither fear nor temptation affected him. He remained poised in the remembrance of the Benign Lord. In a *shabad*, exquisitely sensitive in word and image, he sang :

If there be palaces made of pearls
 and they be studded with gems and jewels;
Their plaster be mixed of musk, saffron, and sandal
 and their very sight should fill the heart with delight;
Even then may I not be enticed
 and neglect to remember Thy Name!

If the floor be paved with crystals clear,
 and the bridal bed be set with rubies;
If damsels bedecked with diamonds of ray pure
 should wait with words of love;
Even then may I not be enticed
 and neglect to remember Thy Name!

If I were master of all magical powers
 and could create treasures of wealth by my command;
If I could become invisible at will
 and the people should give me their constant adoration;
Even then may I not be enticed
 and neglect to remember Thy Name!

If I were a sovereign with mighty armies
 and had thrones underneath my feet;
If my writ should run absolute and unchallenged
 and were acknowledged in all directions;
Even then may I not be enticed
 and neglect to remember Thy Name!²

²Guru Granth, *Sri*, p. 14.

It was the year 1496.³ The summer rains had set in and the hills and rivers in the Punjab ran flooded with water. Thick dark clouds drunk with moisture floated amidst cool winds across the skies. In this season of soaring spirits and natural exuberance, Guru Nanak left home to begin his long and arduous journeys in fulfilment of his life's work. The trials and endurance involved in such an undertaking in the India of those days must have been manifest to him, but too deep for such thoughts was the compassion of his heart and his concern to take to the people his healing words of love and adoration. He came into town to take leave of his wife. Bidding her farewell, he went to see his sister. Overwhelmingly affectionate had been her and Jairam's courtesies towards him and parting from them could not have been without pain. For Sister Nanaki, Guru Nanak had reserved a special favour : he promised to visit her in Sultanpur whenever she so wished it in her heart. She had no children of her own. Sulakhni left the elder son with her and went home with the younger to her parents in Batala.

Guru Nanak uttered a hymn of gratefulness as he entered upon this new phase of his mission. "An humble bard was I without occupation," he sang. "Praise be to Him that He called me to work. The command came for the bard to be at

³*Bala*, p. 68. The only other Janamsakhi which is specific on this point is Meharban's. It states that Guru Nanak came from Talwandi to Sultanpur when he was more than 35 years of age, and embarked on his travels two years later. This would take the year of his departure from Sultanpur to 1508—a date which seems improbable. It is not likely that he stayed much longer in Talwandi after Father Kalu's repeated expressions of anxiety about his future. In any case, the Janamsakhis provide no purpose or design to fill his years in Talwandi until he was thirty-five and more. Here the *Bala* version that he came to Sultanpur at the age of eighteen seems nearer the truth. The *Bala* statement that Guru Nanak left Sultanpur at the age of twenty-seven, i.e., in 1496, is accepted by later writers such as Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (*A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 5) and gets support from Indubhusan Banerjee (*Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. I, p. 77) and W. H. McLeod (*Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, pp. 143-44).

His service morning and evening and every day. The Master summoned him to His presence and conferred upon him the gift of praise . . . The bard is given to spreading His Word . . .”⁴ Writing in verse years afterwards, Bhai Gurdas thus described the assumption by Guru Nanak of his spiritual inheritance, “The doors of divine grace were first opened to him and he made meditations deep and austere. He secured His goodwill and was admitted to the Realm of Truth. Here he was bequeathed the abundance of Name and humility. Then he contemplated upon the state of the world and he saw the whole earth consumed in suffering. He clad himself in the religious way and set out to redeem the world and the humankind.”⁵

Dressed in a composite garb which belonged to none of the prevalent orders and which indeed was symbolic of his common message for all and accompanied by the Muslim associate Mardana, he set out on his travels which took him to all the four corners of India and beyond. The travels occupied him for 23 years. In the course of these tours he met a vast variety of people. He shared the hospitality of humble homes and he rested sometimes under bare skies. He went to small unknown villages and he visited the seats of the mighty. He mixed with simple, unlettered men and he discoursed with the learned. He attended fairs and festivals, temples and mosques, hermitaries and *khanqahs*. He spoke with individuals engaged in their daily trades and he preached to multitudes conveniently reached at ancient centres of pilgrimage. Many found peace in his gentle words of love and faith and were won over to his simple teaching. Many were his deeds of mercy and compassion. As a result of these wide-ranging

⁴Guru Granth, *Var Majh*, p. 150.

⁵*Var I*, 24.

and persistent odysseys, elements of a new spiritual and social creativity began to take shape in the life of the community.

The rigours of the journey were relieved by spells of inspired composition of sacred verse and by the humorous situations into which Guru Nanak's companion Mardana frequently involved himself by his amiable *faux pas*. Weak in respect to fleshly wants, he became panicky when prospects of getting the next meal seemed less than certain. He was not easily convinced when Guru Nanak told him to be patient and have trust in something turning up, and wished always to be prepared beforehand with the rations.

Guru Nanak and Mardana had not come out very far from Sultanpur when the latter complained that he felt very hungry and needed something to eat immediately. The Guru pointed to the village they had passed and said that, if he went there, he would be well entertained by Kashatriyas of the Uppal caste who lived in it. Mardana turned his footsteps in that direction and, arriving in the village, he found everyone more than hospitable. He was fed sumptuously and given ample alms. As he saw him return loaded with a bundle, Guru Nanak, says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, rolled on the ground laughing. Mardana realized the oddity of what he had done and did not know how to get rid of what he had collected. The Guru had to tell him that they must not take offerings from anyone.

Crossing the Beas, Guru Nanak came upon a natural lake ringed by groves of rain-washed trees. He was attracted by the picturesque spot⁶ and stayed there ruminating on God's greatness. The tree—a shrivelled berry but yet

⁶On this site, Guru Ram Das, Nanak IV, had a pool made and laid the foundation of the city of Amritsar in 1577. His successor Guru Arjun constructed in 1589 a shrine inside this pool. This was in later times rebuilt into what is now known as the Golden Temple.

fruit-bearing—under which he sat still stands on the north side of the holy tank in Amritsar. Thirty miles westward was Lahore where this time he made a brief halt. A shrine now marks the place where, according to one version,⁷ the Guru stayed seventeen days. He journeyed thenceforward to Talwandi. His parents were saddened to see him in his unworldly costume. Father Kalu, now an aging man, no longer wished to plead with his son or attempt any dissuasion. Both he and Mother Tripta, in fact, felt thankful in their hearts that they had the chance to see him again. The latter was especially gratified to have him eat meals cooked by her hand as in the years long past. Blessed in soul to meet him was Rai Bular who had learned to admire him before anyone else and had always cherished his company. The visit Guru Nanak had now made to Talwandi was counted by the Rai as an act of favour towards him. Mardana who spent the time with his family was avidly sought after by his old-time friends and companions.

Not many days had passed at Talwandi before Guru Nanak came out to resume the journey. He told his parents and Rai Bular that he must go to serve the Lord's command. As they emerged into the open, Guru Nanak asked Mardana which direction they might take. "How do I know, Master? Yours is the lead : I only follow," replied Mardana.

Guru Nanak's route lay towards the north-west. Travelling a distance of about sixty miles, he reached the town of Saidpur,⁸ or Saidpur Sandiali, commemorating in this latter designation the ancient *rishi*, or sage, Shandilya, as well as a name acquired after the advent of the Muslims. Guru Nanak walked straight to the house of one Lalo, an

⁷Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, Vol. I, pp. 127-28.

⁸The town, now called Eminabad, is in Gujranwala district, in Pakistan. One of the popular traditions is that Babar who sacked the place in 1520 gave it this name after Emma, the waterman's wife, who had parched gram for him to eat.

humble carpenter, who sat in the courtyard making wooden-
pegs with chisel and saw. He greeted him by his name as if
he had known him before and remarked, "Will you be
making wooden-pegs all your life, Lalo?"

Lalo was startled from his somnolence and joined in
salutation his rugged hands, calloused from daily toil.
The question the strange visitor had asked him stirred the
depths of his heart. Yet he could say nothing beyond a few
grateful words of welcome. He gave his guests two stools he
had improvised for his customers and went inside to prepare
something for them to eat. Mardana wondered at the
inscrutable ways of his Master. Why he should have chosen
to come to the poorest home in the city in preference to the
more prosperous ones? Try as he might, he could not
explain this to himself. The food that came alarmed him—
thick bread made of coarse grain and a ball of boiled spi-
nach. But Guru Nanak ate this barest of fares with hearty
relish. As he ate, he talked with his host in his gentle and
engaging way. Lalo felt a sense of contentment growing
inside him. He understood the import of the question he had
been asked. His mind was awakened, and he learned that
a life of honest labour was embellished manifoldly by the
remembrance of God's Name.

Upon Lalo's entreaty Guru Nanak extended his stay in
Saidpur. But by putting up in his house he was transgress-
ing the bounds of custom. News soon spread through the
Hindu families that a high-born Kashatriya was staying with
the low-caste Lalo and went about with a Muslim as his com-
panion. "Nanak the misguided" was the name given him
by the peeved townsmen.

The Hindu steward of the local Muslim chief announced
a grand feast such as men of rank occasionally made for
charity and style. The Sikh chroniclers have recorded
his name as Malik Bhago. The invitation was to every

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caste-Hindu and to all sadhus and faqirs wherever they should be in town or in the vicinity. On the appointed day people thronged the Malik's house. His entertainment matched the swarming numbers and he felt elated at the thought that none of the invited could have missed the occasion or remained unfed. A report was, however, made to him that there was then in Saidpur a holy man called Nanak, born of Kashatriya parents in the neighbouring district, who had not responded to his invitation. Messengers were immediately despatched to bring Guru Nanak to his house. When he arrived, Malik Bhago spoke to the Guru in resentful tones, "Today the entire town is feeding here in my house. How is it that you ignored my invitation? Or, is it that the food your casteless host serves you is better than mine?"

"I eat what God sends. There are no castes in God's sight," said Guru Nanak.

"Then, you should also eat whatever is offered in this house."

Sumptuous victuals upon which had feasted so many of his guests were summoned from the Malik's kitchens. At the same time, the Guru asked for food to be brought from Lalo's house. In the words of *Bala Janamsakhi*, "Guru Nanak took Lalo's coarse bread in his right hand and Malik Bhago's delicacies in the left. As he pressed both, milk dropped from Lalo's coarse bread and blood from Malik Bhago's delicacies. The entire assembly was lost in amazement."⁹

Guru Nanak's precept was clear. The rich man's wealth was selfishly amassed at the cost of others and his charities were not religious. Truly religious was the giving by the poor man who earned his simple bread by honest labour

⁹P. 81.

and was yet willing to share it with his neighbour.

Lalo's humble dwelling became the meeting-place for the disciples who came to listen to the preaching of Guru Nanak and remained so even after he had left to resume his travels. The group was then the responsibility of Lalo who has been described by some of the chroniclers as the first emissary of the Sikh faith. Another spot visited regularly by large numbers of people was where Guru Nanak spent his mornings outside the town performing his meditations. Both Hindus and Muslims went. The former claimed him as their *tapa*, or saint, and the latter as their *pir*, or guide.

Guru Nanak was still in Saidpur when the young son of the local Muslim overlord fell ill with a serious malady. He tried various remedies, but the boy grew worse day by day. As hope of saving his life ebbed, Malik Bhago suggested to his chief to seek for his son the blessing of some perfect saint. In order to locate such a one all the holy men in the district were ordered to be brought to the Nawab's palace and were beseeched by him to pray for his son. Guru Nanak who was among the holy men assembled spoke to him, "Have you ever seen grapes grow on the thorny *kikar*-tree? Can honey be extracted from the poisonous *akk*-plant? How can you expect compulsion to bring forth benediction for you or your ailing son?" The Nawab realized the enormity of what he had done and expressed regret in expiation of his error. As he was leaving with the other detenus, Guru Nanak said that his son's wellbeing lay in the blessed crumbs of a pious man. A piece of bread was brought from Lalo's house and given to the boy to eat. He began to mend from that day and was cured of his sickness.

CHAPTER VIII

RECLAMATION OF SAJJAN

SAIDPUR and Lalo are among the more commonly recognized landmarks of Guru Nanak's itinerant years. He visited them more than once, and, if any place or person connected with events in his life is referred to in his own compositions, it is these.¹ What happened in Saidpur was illustrative of the manner in which he took his message to the people and changed the lives of those who came in touch with him. Thus his gentle ministry progressed. Of the several months after Guru Nanak departed from Saidpur and of many a mile he traversed, nothing is recorded by the Janamsakhis except when he crossed Harappa and arrived at a place in the neighbourhood of the town of Tulamba, in the south-west Punjab.

Here there lived near the highway one Shaikh Sajjan in apparent piety and prosperity. He maintained a mosque as well as a temple for use by Muslim and Hindu travellers and seemed to welcome anyone for a night's lodging and meal. Many a wayfarer felt relieved and grateful when, at the end of a day's journey, he was led into such a hospitable home. The sleeping guests were Sajjan's victims and their goods his property. After despatching the traveller with

¹Saidpur, or Eminabad, is not directly mentioned, but the *shabads* describing the devastation caused by Babar's army known as *Babar-vani*, are safely assumed to contain a reference to the attack on this town in 1520. Lalo is mentioned by name in the hymn when Guru Nanak says, "As the Lord's word comes to me so do I proclaim, O Lalo!"

the help of his band of thugs, he would appear in the morning with his pilgrim's staff and rosary and spread out a carpet to pray.

In Guru Nanak's lustrous face the far-seeing Sajjan read the signs of affluence. The guest was therefore all the more welcome and entitled to more than usual courtesy. But at night the Guru tarried long before going to bed. Sajjan who had been waiting got impatient. At last, he came near the door to see inside the room. Mardana was playing on the rebeck and the Guru was singing a hymn in enraptured devotion. The sight held Sajjan. The sweet music thrilled him. It calmed the agitation in his heart and he felt a new consciousness welling up in him. He fell at the Guru's feet and confessed remorsefully how sinful he was. The Guru assured him that he could yet hope for God's grace and forgiveness if he confessed and repented. Sajjan owned his sins and prayed the Guru for pardon. One condition was laid upon him : he must deliver all of his possessions which he had collected by impious means. "Then," says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, "Sajjan obeyed. He brought out all the things and gave them away in God's name."² He converted his house into a *dharamsala*,³ or place of worship and charity, and became a zealous disseminator of the Guru's teaching.

Near the present-day town of Makhdumpur in that district, now in Pakistan, is the tomb of Sajjan. A ruined mound near it is also known by his name.

"And the Baba, i.e., the Guru, went along the way."

A phrase to this effect was frequently employed by *Puratan*

²P. 26.

³This was the word then used for a place where Guru Nanak's disciples gathered for worship. The word *gurdwara*, denoting a Sikh place of worship, as indeed the word *Sikh* itself, came into use later, although, in the villages in the Punjab, *dharamsala* and *gurdwara* are still occasionally employed interchangeably.

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Janamsakhi to describe the beginning of a journey by Guru Nanak or to cover unmarked stretches of it. After leaving Sajjan, he travelled eastward. No event is mentioned by the Janamsakhis until he had trekked across the entire breadth of the Punjab and reached, at the other extremity, Kuruksetra, the ancient site of the Mahabharata battle. Here, according to the *Janamsakhi*, he invited the wrath of the Brahman devotees by cooking a deer brought him by a disciple.⁴ They called this an act of grave profanation and were ready to take an angry reprisal. But the Guru spoke to them calmly and the words he uttered were listened to heedfully. "It is," he said, "not easy to tell who sins—he who eats flesh or he who excludes flesh from his diet. They who forswear flesh and hold their noses when near it might have no qualms about devouring their fellowmen under cover of darkness ... Those uninstructed in the truth eat what they should not and eat not what they should."⁵

From Kuruksetra Guru Nanak journeyed south-east to Delhi. On the way, he stopped at Panipat which was the centre of the Sufi order founded by Abu 'Ali Qalandar, also known as Shah Sharaf.⁶ As the Guru and Mardana sat resting near a well, the disciple of the Shaikh who then occupied Shah Sharaf's seat came there to fetch water for his master. Judging from his dress, he took Guru Nanak for a Persian dervish and greeted him with the salutation,

⁴Bala, pp. 428-30.

⁵Guru Granth, *Var Malar*, p. 1289.

⁶All Janamsakhis except Mcharban's refer to a meeting between Guru Nanak and Shah Sharaf of Panipat. Abu 'Ali Qalandar, popularly called Shah Sharaf, died in 1324. Maybe, this popular name was traditionally associated with the convent which preserved his memory. This could have been the cause of the chroniclers' error in applying this designation to his successor who was Guru Nanak's contemporary.

“Peace be to thee!” The Guru replied, “Salutation to the Ineffable Lord!” The disciple who had never before heard the Muslim greeting being answered in this manner returned to tell the Shaikh about the strange dervish he had met. The Shaikh wished to be escorted to the spot and, reaching there, started interrogating the Guru about his dress, his beliefs and the religious sect to which he belonged. The *Puratan Janamsakhi* records the questions in Persian and the answers given by the Guru in long Punjabi verses. One of the Shaikh’s questions was, “Who is a real dervish?” Guru Nanak said :

He who dies unto his self while he lives
 and loses himself while he wakes,
 Who lets himself be destituted
 And surrendering himself completely meets the Beloved,
 Is a real dervish.
 Such dervishes serve but one Lord.
 They are unperturbed by joy or grief,
 And they feel not anger, wrath, pride or avarice.
 They are not tempted by worldly riches
 And discern what is right and lawful.
 They render obedience to the Lord’s commands
 And acknowledge none other.
 They rejoice ever in Heavenly glory :
 Neither the Vedas nor the Qur’an
 Can encompass the holiness of such saintly men.⁷

The Shaikh was so pleased to hear the Guru’s replies that he spoke to his companion, “Marvellous, marvellous, indeed ! What credentials do we require of him who witnesses God Himself? Just to behold such a one is enough.”⁸

When the Guru reached Delhi, “there arose,” says *Meharban Janamsakhi*, “a loud applause among the people

⁷This is from the *Janamsakhi*, and not from Guru Nanak’s own compositions.

⁸*Puratan*, p. 28.

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that Guru Nanak had come. The citizens, spectators as well as seekers, the Hindus as well as the Muslims, turned out to see the great faqir who had arrived in their city.”⁹ According to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, the Sultan of Delhi came to pay his homage riding the royal elephant the Guru had resurrected by his words of mercy uttered upon hearing the bewailing of the keepers of the dead animal.

While returning from Delhi, Guru Nanak and Mardana met on the road a Sufi Shaikh whose name, as given in *Puratan Janamsakhi*, was Wazid. The Shaikh reclined in ease in a palanquin which was being carried by a team of six attendants. He alighted as they came to a shady spot. His servants made a cushioned bed for him on the ground and commenced to fan and shampoo him. Mardana was amused to see this and asked the Guru, “Is there one God or two, Master?”

“Why, God is one,” replied the Guru.

“Then who made this man who rides in a sedan and gets tired in the luxury of it and who made these six men who brought him on their shoulders running on their feet with naked bodies and even now massage his limbs and fan him?” asked Mardana.

“It is not easy to explain God’s ways. In impoverishment may be the secret of abundance and in abundance the thorn of impoverishment. Understanding comes by His grace only,” said the Guru.

At Hardwar, the ancient place of Hindu pilgrimage on the sacred Ganges, Guru Nanak stood with the pilgrims on the spot where the waters of the river were considered to be the holiest. As they dipped themselves in the river to perform their ablutions, the pilgrims prayed and tossed water in palmsful towards the rising sun in the east. The Guru

⁹P. 114.

took to throwing water to the west. The people were surprised to see this and wondered how anybody could act in such a sacrilegious manner. Some thought he was crazed in the mind; others said that he must be a Turk. Soon a crowd gathered round him and began to question him, "Are you a Hindu or a Musalman? Why do you throw water to the west? Whom will it avail?" "Whom will your water benefit?" he asked in return.

They told him that they were offering oblations to the spirits of their deceased ancestors. This was for their satisfaction. Upon this reply the Guru continued his procedure with even greater earnestness. The pilgrims became puzzled. "What do you mean by offering water to the west?" they asked him again. "This is for my farm near Lahore which needs watering," said the Guru. The listeners felt amused and asked him how anyone could send water so many miles away.

"How far must our ancestors be from here?" asked the Guru. "My water has but to cross Sirhind and then it will roll down to Lahore which is barely a stone's throw from there."¹⁰ The people realized that he was no common man and were willing to listen to him. Guru Nanak taught them to seek merit in the love of God rather than in empty religiosity.

Seeing the pilgrims cook their food within circles marked on the ground to keep it from the shadow of a passing low-caste, Guru Nanak uttered a *shabad*. He said that defilement came from within, not from without. "The real pariahs are the evil thoughts, cruelty, slander and wrath. It avails not one to draw circles around himself if these four were seated beside him. Let your demarcations be of truth, self-restraint and good acts and your ablutions the remem-

¹⁰ *Meharban*, p. 118.

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brance of His name. They alone shall be reckoned holy who lend not their steps to sin.”¹¹

Further towards the east in the submontane ranges of the Himalayas, Guru Nanak passed through a district given to tantric worship. The Hindu chieftain of Almora, in the Kumaon hills, made human sacrifices to propitiate the goddess he adored. Guru Nanak preached in this country the praise of One God and reclaimed the chieftain from the cult he practised. Not far from there was the forest-abode of a community of Nath yogis, or Siddhas. They lived in penance away from the world seeking mystical experience and magical prowess in bodily control and immolation. Their faith which was a mixture of Vajrayana Buddhism and devotional asceticism exercised a peculiar spell on the popular mind. They called themselves the followers of Gorakh after whom the place where they lived was known as Gorakhmata, or the temple of Gorakh. Their wooded preserve was generally inaccessible to those who did not belong to their order. Outsiders, in fact, feared to go near it because of their obscure practices and uncertain temper. The Siddha yogis had several such centres in northern India.

“Sat Kartar—the Creator is the eternal truth,” exclaimed Guru Nanak as he and Mardana came upon this retreat called Gorakhmata. They sat down under a tree. Mardana went to a yogi seated upright in front of a smoking-fire to bring from it a light to warm the winter night. The yogi angrily turned him away. Mardana felt sorely dejected as he came back empty-handed, and the Guru consoled him to restore his spirits. According to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, the tree under which Guru Nanak sat and which was long withered from age put on new foliage. The yogis wondered

¹¹Guru Granth, *Sri*, p. 91.

at the strange occurrence and came in a body to talk with the Guru.

“O young man, whose disciple art thou? From whom didst thou receive thy instruction?” they asked him.

The Guru uttered a *shabad* in which he said that the Master he served was beyond description. “Who besides Him could be the guide, who the instructor? Who could appraise His worth? O my Beloved, I know not Thy end.”

The Siddhas thought they had met a true aspirant to yoga. They invited the Guru to join their order. “Become a yogi and take the garb of our sect. So shalt thou find true religion.” The Guru answered with the following hymn :

Religion lies not in the yogi's patched garment,
nor in his staff,
nor in besmearing the body with ashes.
Religion lies not in suspending large rings
from split ears,
nor in shaving the head nor in the blowing of horns.
To live uncontaminated amid worldly temptations
is to find the secret of religion.

Religion lies not in empty words.
He who regards all men as equal is religious.

Religion lies not in wandering outside
to tombs and places of cremation,
nor in postures of contemplation.
Religion lies not in roaming abroad,
nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage.
To live uncontaminated amid worldly temptations
is to find the secret of religion.¹²

The yogis made their salutation in reverence to the Guru.

The Guru's teaching in this region rescued many from superstition. Groups of people are still there who call themselves Nanakpanthis, or followers of Guru Nanak.

¹²Guru Granth, *Suhi*, p. 730.

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They are in direct descent from communities of disciples which came into being in his time, although they remained unacquainted with the subsequent Sikh development. Gorakhmata came to be known as Nanakmata, or the seat of Guru Nanak. The place is fifteen miles north-west of the present-day town of Pilibhit, in the Uttar Pradesh.

Forty miles to the east of Nanakmata there is another spot sacred to the memory of the Guru. A tradition later than the Janamsakhis tells how he made bitter soapnuts sweet. As he and Mardana were passing through a jungle, the disciple complained of hunger. Guru Nanak told him to shake a branch of the tree overhead. The fruit which dropped was sweet and edible. The tree is still shown to pilgrims who visit the site continuously throughout the year. Part of the tree bears sweet nuts whereas the rest of it the natural bitter ones. The pilgrims reverently bring sweet soapnuts and distribute bits of these among their friends and relations. This way perhaps every devotee of the Guru gets the opportunity at one time or another to partake of the sacrament from the distant tree.

CHAPTER IX

IMPALING-STAKE REDUCED TO A THORN

FROM the hill-forests on the spurs of the Himalayas Guru Nanak and Mardana descended by slow marches towards the broad plain of the Ganges. As they were, says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, overtaken by the rainy season, they stopped in a village. Hearing of the Guru's arrival, a shopkeeper from the nearby town came to have an audience. Afterwards he came continually to serve. He made the vow that he would not touch food unless he had first visited the Guru in the morning and invoked his blessing.

One of the neighbouring shopkeepers asked him, "Listen, brother! Why do you go to that village daily? What rendezvous calls you thither? Before this you visited that village but rarely." The disciple said, "There is a pious one come and a sight of him cancels the sin and suffering of ages. I go to him before dawn every day." "Then I must come with you sometimes," said the second shopkeeper.

They proceeded together one day, but the second shopkeeper saw a slave-girl on the way and became attached to her. Daily they set out together, one to visit his mistress and the other to visit his Guru. The second shopkeeper was not certain how much worse off he was than his companion. One day he asked, "Brother, I go to sin every day while you go on a virtuous errand. I wonder what will accrue to you and what befalls me. Let us make a test by seeing what happens to each of us today. If you return first, wait for me here, and if I should come first I shall sit down here and wait for you."

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This was agreed upon. The second shopkeeper did not find his mistress at home and came back to the appointed place. In dejection, he started scraping the earth with a pebble he had picked. Soon he discovered that he had struck upon a gold coin. Then having drawn out his knife he dug deeper and hit a jar of charcoal.

Meanwhile, the first shopkeeper arrived bare of one foot and carrying the slipper in his hand.

“Why, brother, have you drawn off one of your slippers? Why don’t you put it on?” asked the other.

“A thorn pierced my foot after I had left my Guru’s presence and I had to tie it up with a piece of linen. So I am carrying the slipper in my hand.”

“Today I have found a gold mohur,” said the second shopkeeper, “and you have your foot torn by a thorn. We must ask about this matter, for you are the one who practises piety and I who sins.”

Both came to the Guru with their question. The Guru told them that it was not easy to define God’s ways. Maybe, for one of them, what was a treasure of gold coins turned into a jar of ashes and, for the other, what was an impaling-stake was reduced to a thorn. “One’s deeds make the parchment and the mind is the quill. Thus are good and bad being marked. Man’s life is what his acts make it. But limitless is God’s grace by which all is transmuted.”¹

As the rains receded, Guru Nanak departed from the village. On the road he was encountered by a party of brigands. They said to themselves, “In whose face there is such a lustre cannot be empty. There must be much money in his purse.” They surrounded the Guru and Mardana, but, as they looked upon the former more closely, they began to lose heart. The Guru asked them who they were.

¹Guru Granth, *Maru*, p. 990.

“We are thugs. We waylay and rob the travellers and kill them,” they answered. “Then, go,” said the Guru, “and bring some fire from where you see that smoke coming so that you might cremate your victims.”

The thugs were taken by surprise. They had not heard anyone speak to them like this before. Realization suddenly came to them that they had met their deliverer. They fell down at the Guru’s feet and begged to be saved : “Pardon our misdeeds, Master! We have committed many sins.”

The Guru became moved with compassion and spoke, “Your sins will be destroyed if you give up the occupation you live by. Go and give away all you have collected by robbing others. Take to agriculture and make an honest living. Seek holy company.”² They repented and returned to their homes.

At the beginning of the winter season, the Guru arrived at Ayodhya, sacred as the birthplace of Sri Rama, who is adored by the Hindus as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The city was at that time preparing itself for the festival it had been celebrating annually for unknown centuries to mark the return of Sri Rama after his fourteen-year exile. The Bairagis, sadhus of the Vaishnavite sect, who always thronged the occasion were pouring in from all directions. Amidst assemblies of the devotees Guru Nanak sang hymns to the One Transcendent Being and preached how merits of religion could be obtained in a life of worldly occupation illumined, by grace, with neighbourly love and service.

Further south on the Guru’s way was Prayag, modern Allahabad, a place of Hindu pilgrimage on the junction of the rivers Ganges and Jumna. The point of confluence of the waters is considered especially holy for bathing. That being a day of special religious importance, the pilgrims

²*Puratan*, p. 38.

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were more numerous than usual. The setting was perfectly suited to the Guru's style. He sat down on the bank amid the milling crowds and raised a song in honour of the Divine, with Mardana accompanying him on his favourite rebeck. As sweet harmony flowed from his lips, several of the pilgrims stopped and stood enthralled by the scene. A priest who had been watching the Guru since his arrival came shouting, "Time is running out. I have not seen you bathe. You will not have this opportunity again in your lifetime of washing away your sins."

"How does one wash away one's sins?" asked the Guru. "By bathing the body in the river? How will that cleanse the heart of its impurity?" The Guru then broke out into another song, "Whoever was made pure by washing the body? They are truly pure in whose hearts dwells the Lord..."

The next important place of halt was Benares, or Varanasi, sixty-five miles to the east of Allahabad. As he arrived in this ancient city of holy learning, Guru Nanak, according to *Meharban Janamsakhi*, "saw everywhere, Pandits, or learned Brahmans, studying attentively the Scriptures. Pupils sat around them on the ground taking instruction from them. There were Vaishnavas worshipping the stones and there were the bare-bodied ascetics engaged in various forms of penance. Some sat outside in the cemetery in postures of meditation."³

Guru Nanak's apparel which was neither of a householder nor of a hermit attracted notice. One of the leading Pandits, Chatur Das, came and began to question him, "What faith do you profess? You carry no Saligram, the devotee's stone, nor do you wear the necklace of Tulsi, the holy basil. You have no rosary and no mark of white clay upon your fore-

³P. 139.

head. What devotion have you attached yourself to?"

The Guru asked Mardana to play the rebeck and made the hymn, "Let God's Name be the Saligram thou adorest and good deeds the basil-wreath round thy neck. Seek divine grace and let this be thy raft's anchor. Why waste thy time watering barren land and plastering walls built on sand? Let good deeds be the string of vessels to draw water from the well and yoke thy mind to the wheel. Distil the nectar and irrigate with it the land. Then wilt thou be owned by the Gardener."⁴

Chatur Das was proud of his learning and invited the Guru to stay in Benares and master various branches of knowledge. "Take something of the merit of this city," he said. "Here we teach all of the fourteen sciences, i.e., reading, astrology, alchemy, medicine, theology, grammar, sex, music, singing, the six *ragas* and their *raginis*, horsemanship, swimming, dancing, archaeology and statesmanship." The Guru said that for him only one word was of real account. He reckoned him truly learned who engaged himself in the service of others.

According to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, Guru Nanak here uttered all the fifty-four stanzas of his long composition called "Dakhni Omkar" enunciating the nature of the True One and of His creation. A new understanding dawned upon Pandit Chatur Das. He fell at the Guru's feet and turned a disciple. A group of followers attached to the message of the Guru formed around him.

And, says the *Janamsakhi*, the Baba went along the way.⁵

⁴Guru Granth, *Basant Hindol*, p. 1171.

⁵According to *Meharban*, Kabir met Guru Nanak at the time of his Benares visit. Assuming that it was chronologically possible, there is little supporting evidence for such a meeting having taken place. There exists wide divergence of opinion regarding Kabir's dates. According to one view, he died in 1448, which is before Guru Nanak's birth. But even if the later date of 1518 is accepted, no reliable

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Travelling further east, he arrived at Gaya on the left bank of the Phalgu river, where Lord Buddha had attained Enlightenment, but which was now the stronghold of Brahmanical worship. People visited the town especially to perform certain rites for their manes allegorizing at the same time perhaps the obsequies for Buddhism banished from the land of its birth by Hinduism. Offerings made for them at any of the forty-five specific points were supposed to do the spirits good in the other world. Funeral cakes given in their names were supposed to bring them satiety and the tiny lamps lighted, to illuminate their paths in the regions beyond.

The Pandas, or priests who directed these ceremonies, surrounded the Guru and Mardana urging acceptance of their services. The Guru declined these saying that men obtained in the next world only what they earned by their deeds here. Nothing offered in their behalf could secure them repose or satisfaction. "... The rice-cakes placed on platters made of leaf are of no avail. God's Name alone redeems. This is one's support both here and hereafter, behind and in front ... The Brahmans make the rolls for the departed souls and eat them. What lasts and truly saves is the Divine grace."⁶

One of those who joined the Guru's way was Dev Gir, the chief priest of Buddha Gaya. He led the *sangat*, or the disciples' congregation, after the Guru had left and carried on the message delivered by him. Bhagwan Gir, third in

testimony is available to confirm that Guru Nanak ever met Kabir or that he was familiar with his works. Kabir's compositions were included in the Guru Granth by Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru. But so were the hymns of some of the Bhaktas which were in conformity with the spirit of the Guru's teachings. Among these holy men were Farid who lived before Kabir's time, Ravidas who was his contemporary and Surdas who came after him.

⁶Guru Granth, *Asa*, p. 358.

succession from him, is said to have met and received instruction from Guru Har Rai, the Seventh Guru (1644-61).⁷ Another place in this district which marks Guru Nanak's visit is Rajauli, on the left bank of the Dhanarji. In this town lived a faqir, Kalhan Shah, admired for his piety and hard penance. He found solace in meeting the Guru and 'became informed of his teaching. Two shrines dedicated to their names stand in Rajauli adjacent to each other. The Shah's, called Chhoti (Junior) Sangat, encloses a smoking-fire said to have been kept alive from the days of the faqir and is looked after by a Muslim *pir*, and the Guru's, called Bari (Senior) Sangat, is managed by an Udasi sadhu.

Taking a north-easterly course, Guru Nanak and Mardana arrived at Patna, old Pataliputra, on the edge of the Ganges. Mardana complained of fatigue and hunger. The Guru gave him a piece of stone he had picked in the jungle and asked him to go into town to buy with it what he needed. Mardana showed the stone from shop to shop, but had it returned to him disdainfully every time until he came to Salis Rai the jeweller. Salis Rai scanned the stone spell-bound. Then he handed it back to Mardana and said that he must meet the owner of such a priceless jewel. He asked his servant Adhrakka to take some presents and fruit with him and, led by Mardana, came to the place where the Guru was. Both master and attendant entered the path of discipleship and became dedicated to the Guru's word and mission. Adhrakka's service was valued equally with Salis Rai's and they jointly ran the followers' group after Guru Nanak departed from Patna. The descendants of the former, Gulab Rai and Ghansham Das, held the diocese in the time of Guru Gobind Singh, who was born in that city. The jeweller's descendant, Fateh Chand Maini, was one of the

⁷Bhai Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth*, Vol. IX, pp. 3572-76.

Guru's favourite disciples.⁸

Journeying through Bengal, the Guru arrived in what has been described as Kauru, or Kamrupa (Assam), then known as the land of magic and witchcraft. The *Puratan Janamsakhi* relates the story of how Mardana was bewitched by an enchantress. Troubled by pangs of hunger, he begged leave of the Guru to go into the city to bring some food. "Do go if you have to," said the Guru. "But, beware! This is the country of Kauru and here women command."

As Mardana was passing through a street, a woman standing at the door of her house called him inside. He obeyed as if fascinated. No sooner did he step across the threshold than he was turned into a ram and was fastened with a thread. The Guru set out in search of him and entered the house where he was kept in captivity. He demanded of the sorceress to return his man to him. Instead of releasing Mardana from bondage, she tried her skill on the Guru. Finding herself powerless, she sent word to other female conjurers to come from wherever they were, and, as says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, "they arrived with all their black knowledge. One came mounted on a tree, another came mounted on a deer-skin, another on the moon, another on a wall, another brought a tiger with her and another reached beating a drum."⁹ Then they started working their spells by tying knots on the threads they carried. But nothing availed. The Guru looked towards where Mardana was and the thrall which held him broke.

Last of all came Nur Shah, the queen of the sorceresses, accompanied by her favourite associates. She applied all the arts she had mastered, but without effect. Then she made her women dance and sing in the most attractive fashion.

⁸Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 165 (footnotes).

⁹P. 40.

She had fabulous treasures of pearls, jewels, gems, gold, silver, coral, camphor, and brocade brought and laid out in front of the Guru. The Guru made a *shabad*: "... By no art dost thou win the Lord. They alone find Him who learn to efface themselves. That day is fortunate for the bride when the Bridegroom looketh upon her with favour; she hath then all the treasures of the world in her lap. She is the true bride and she the queen of all who gaineth the love of her Spouse. She is in true exultation and she in perfect sanity who is absorbed day and night in His name. She is fair and she is handsome: she is accomplished and she is it who alone will be reckoned wise."¹⁰

Nur Shah threw her scarf round her neck in penitence and made obeisance before the Guru. She, along with her slaves, was converted and became an adherent of the Guru's preaching.

The *Puratan Janamsakhi* here describes the Guru's encounter with Kaliyug. As the Guru and Mardana were passing through a remote wilderness, Kaliyug stirred up a violent storm. So severe was the tempest that the trees of the jungle began to fly about. Mardana was petrified with fear and, in the words of the *Janamsakhi*, thus spoke to the Guru, "True sovereign, thou hast brought me to my death in this desert. I shall not here get even a shroud or a grave."

The Guru asked him to remain calm and not feel troubled. Mardana answered, "Up to this day in my life I have not faced a calamity like this. Who knows what is going to befall this frail frame of mine today?" Then fire was demonstrated. Smoke arose in all four corners and all four sides became ablaze like lightning. Mardana covered up his face and laid himself down on the ground saying, "Who

¹⁰Guru Granth, *Tilang*, p. 722.

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lives now?" Then came water. Thick clouds gathered and the skies descended in torrents. But the rain fell at some distance from the Guru.

"Mardana, raise thy head," spoke the Guru. "Rise and play thy rebeck." Mardana rose and tuned the strings. Rag Gauri was made. Guru Nanak recited this *shabad* :

If the fear of God is in the heart,
 all other fear is dispelled.
If one remaineth in fear,
 the heart will be devoid of the fear of God.
I have no other shelter except Thee, my Lord!
Whatever happeneth is Thy will!!
Be affrighted if thou have
 any fear other than that of God.
To live in fear is the mind's disquiet.
The soul dieth not, nor is it drowned :
It is redeemed through God's grace.
He who created the world ordaineth everything :
By His order we come and by His order we go.
His will prevaieth for ever and a day.¹¹

Then, says the *Janamsakhi*, Kaliyug appeared in the form of a hideous demon with his head touching the heavens. But as he came nearer, he shrank in size. By the time he confronted the Guru, he was reduced to the proportions and form of a human being. Joining his hands he stood before the Guru and said, "Thou art the Creator's own minister. I salute thee."¹² Mardana learned how groundless his fears were and how exaggerated impending troubles looked from a distance.

Guru Nanak roamed extensively in Assam preaching love and prayer to a people attached to tantric ritual and theurgic practices. Several places preserve the memory

¹¹Guru Granth, *Gauri*, p. 151.

¹²*Puratan*, p. 44.

of his visit. The most well-known is the shrine at Dhubri, on the right bank of the Brahmaputra, where the Guru spent some time and is said to have met the Vaishnavite reformer Shankardev. This spot was marked in 1667 by Guru Tegh Bahadur himself when he was journeying through eastern India. At Dhubri the Ninth Guru discovered the place hallowed by Guru Nanak's sojourn and had a platform built there as a memorial. From Dhubri, Guru Nanak travelled east to Gauhati and thence on to Manipur. Here¹³ he and Mardana were received with strange apathy. The people showed them scant attention and did, as records *Puratan Janamsakhi*, wash after their departure the spot on which had stood the two unknown visitors to cleanse it of the "pollution" cast upon it. One Jhanda, the carpenter, a man of devout disposition, saw what some others had failed to see. He took the Guru home and found unmeasured joy in his company. He shared the happy tidings with Indersen, a fellow-seeker, who was a nephew of the local chief. Both became disciples. Jhanda was entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the Sikh *sangat* in this part of the country after the Guru's departure. The Guru now returned taking a south-westerly route through Imphal, Silchar, Sylhet and Dacca.¹⁴ Reaching the Bay of Bengal, he made a coastal voyage and arrived at Puri, the city of the temple of Jagannath.

¹³According to *Puratan*, Guru Nanak was now in the country of Bisiar. The geographical location of Bisiar has been variously identified. Macauliffe (*The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I, p. 93) recognizes it as Bushair, in the Simla Hills. Giani Gyan Singh (*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 184) takes it to be the country around Manipur. In the sequence of the Guru's travels, this appears more reasonable. Bhai Vir Singh (*Guru Nanak Chamatkar*, Part I, p. 262) accepts this view.

¹⁴Outside Dacca there were until recently the ruins of a Sikh monastery and a well which marked the spots visited by Guru Nanak. In the city, there was a shrine called Charan Paduka, literally, wooden sandals from holy feet. Shrines similarly known and preserving sandals said to be of the Guru also exist in other places such as Srinagar, Kotdwar and Junagarh.

Jagannath, Lord of the Earth, is the title of Lord Vishnu, second god of the Hindu Triad. The temple is consecrated to the worship of the image of his incarnation as Krishna. In summer every year the idol is mounted on its chariot and taken out in procession. Vast multitudes gather for the festival and many contend for the honour of dragging the wheeled edifice. Some even threw themselves in front of it to be crushed under its wheels and thereby earn religious reward. Guru Nanak and Mardana stopped near the shrine upon which sat centuries of history mute and immobilized. The notes from Mardana's rebeck touched the devotees' hearts with fresh fervour. Several of them came to the holy *sangat* eager to hear the Guru's word. The temple priests felt angry against him and held him guilty for not making adoration to the deity within the sacred enclosure. The local chief whose name has been described as Krishanlal one day visited the Guru and invited him to join the *arati*, or the evening service of lights, in the temple. The Guru readily offered to go with him.

As dusk fell, the priests lighted the lamps and the sumptuous ritual for which the devotees had been waiting began. Twinkling lights fed by *ghee* were placed on a jewel-studded salver, amid flower and incense, and worshipfully swung from side to side by the priest in front of the enshrined image to the accompaniment of the chanting of hymns, blowing of conches and the ringing of bells. The priests had a complaint as they concluded. The Guru had remained seated in his place and not participated in the ceremony. The Guru burst into a song.

The sky is the salver
And the sun and the moon the lamps.
The luminous stars on the heavens are the pearls.
Scented air from the sandal-clad hills is the incense,
The winds make the fan for Thee,

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And the vast forests wreaths of flowers.
The unstruck music of creation is the trumpet.
Thus goes on the *arati* (adoration) for Thee,
O Thou dispeller of doubt and fear!¹⁵

Guru Nanak taught the hearers how Nature's tribute to the Creator was superior to any ritualistic oblation offered before images.

Day after day, Guru Nanak and Mardana saw outside the temple a sadhu who sat with his eyelids constantly sealed. He declared that he could thus see what was happening in all the "three worlds." One day the Guru playfully removed from in front of him the *lota*, or brass jug, in which the devotees threw coins as they passed along and put it behind his back. Missing the familiar jingle in the receptacle, the hermit opened his eyes and raised an alarm as he discovered his loss. The Guru who was standing by pointed out that his *lota* was lying behind him. The pilgrims gathered on the spot felt greatly amused. The sadhu who claimed powers of triple vision was gone from there and did not come again.

At Puri, Guru Nanak met the Vaishnavite saint and reformer of Bengal, Chaitanya (1486–1533). It is recorded that they kept company with each other and joined together in hymn-singing.¹⁶

¹⁵Guru Granth, *Dhanasari*, p. 663.

¹⁶Ishwar Das, *Chaitanya Bhagvata* (Chapters 61 and 64), an Oriya manuscript, preserved by Oriental Society, Cuttack, and quoted by B. B. Majumdar in *Chaitanya-Chriter Upadan*, published by Calcutta University, Calcutta.

CHAPTER X

RETURN TO TALWANDI

MARDANA now began urging the Guru that they had travelled too long and must return to visit their homes and rest their weary limbs. His wish was granted, though his trials were not yet ended.

On his way back, Guru Nanak passed through the tribal areas in Central India ministering to communities primitive in their ways. In this country Mardana once wandered out in search of food and was seized by a marauding giant. His name, as mentioned in *Bala Janamsakhi*, was Kauda.¹ He was the leader of a clan of cannibals and always kept an oil-cauldron sizzling for man or beast that might fall into his hands. Mardana would have met the fate of Kauda's many other luckless victims but for the Guru's timely appearance. The Guru uttered the greeting, "Sat Kartar—the Creator is the eternal truth." The ring of his words startled Kauda. When he turned to look towards the Guru, his heart was touched as never before. He had not known such benignity and tenderness, nor such calm and tranquillity. He released Mardana and fell at the Guru's feet. He was, says *Bala Janamsakhi*, converted and charged with the rescuing of his companions. It is stated that Guru Nanak and Mardana stayed with Kauda for seven days.²

¹The story occurs in all of the four major Janamsakhis, but the accounts differ in details as well as in the locale. The version given here coincides more with the later tradition.

²P. 90.

In the vast wilderness of Central India, Guru Nanak and Mardana once came to a forest through which they trekked for several days without meeting with another human being. Mardana grew panicky and, with the meagre provisions run out, he was reduced to utter desperation. At last he spoke out, "Thanks to the attachment I have owed thee, Master! This is what I have come to! I was a simple *dum* making my living by singing and begging in the village. Now all is lost. There seems to be no way out of this impenetrable jungle. Some lion will roar out from behind the trees and I shall be dead on the spot. I had hoped that I would some day relate to Father Kalu and Rai Bular the amusing stories of your journeys, make them laugh and receive from them gifts of silk garments. But who lives now to do that?"

The Guru told Mardana not to lose heart and join him in singing a *shabad* on his rebeck. But Mardana pleaded that he did not have the strength even to lift the bow.

"Eat the fruit of this overhanging branch and thou shalt have thy energy restored," said the Guru. "Eat thy fill, but do not put any into thy pouch."

Mardana liked the flavour of the fruit and said to himself, "I shall eat as much as I can and save some, too. Such fare may not be had again for a long while." And this is what he did.

When he became hungry again, Mardana put the fruit into his mouth. But as he swallowed it, he clutched his stomach in pain. He fell at the Guru's feet and confessed what he had done. "Thou hadst said, Master," he spoke, "that I should eat to my satiety, but carry none of the fruit with me. But I did. Of this fruit I ate and thus do I suffer now. This *dum* is always hungry. Why dost thou not exempt him from bodily needs and still his hunger forever, Master?"

“Rise Mardana,” spoke the Guru. “Thou art favoured in this world and the next.”³

Mardana arose refreshed and enlightened.

As they issued out of the jungle into inhabited country, Guru Nanak and Mardana entered a village. In this village they were mocked and no one gave them as much as a place to sit. Guru Nanak left it saying, “May the village thrive!” In the next village on their way there was much attention shown them. The Guru remained there a night. Before departing in the morning, he said, “This village shall become deserted.” Mardana was puzzled. “This is strange justice at thy door, Master! The village which refused thee shelter thou savest and the village that served thee thou scatterest! But we understand not thy ways,” he remarked.

The Guru said that the inhabitants of the first village would do well to remain where they were and keep their manners unto themselves, while those of the second should disperse so that others benefited by emulating them.

Passing through villages and towns and stirring a new spiritual awakening, Guru Nanak travelled on and crossed into the Punjab by ferrying the Sutlej at Pakpattan, formerly called Ajodhan. Pakpattan⁴ was famous as the seat of the

³*Puratan*, p. 56.

⁴Literally, the bank, or ferry, of the pure one. The place acquired this name from its association with the great thirteenth-century Sufi mystic, Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar, who lived and died here. The legend relates that Ghazi Beg Tughlak, who lived as a poor village-boy in the neighbourhood of Shaikh Farid, became through his blessing governor of Multan and, ultimately, king of Delhi. He visited Ajodhan and, as a mark of gratitude, had a channel dug in the town. “The stream ran so deep and strong that it was necessary to have a ferry over it. One evening Shaikh Farid came down to the ferry and saw the sun shining on the rippling waves, and people in bright attire bathing and drawing water, while the boats glided backwards and forwards. Enraptured with the sight, he exclaimed: ‘*Ai, kya Pak Pattan!* Oh, what a beautiful ferry!’ After that the old name of Ajodhan was given up, and Pakpattan adopted.” However, in *Ain-i-Akbari* the town is called simply Pattan, or the ferry. The epithet “Pak”, or pure, was probably

celebrated Muslim saint Shaikh Farid. It had also been known for centuries as a centre of commerce and the principal ferry for the Sutlej. It was at this spot that the conquerors Mahmud and Timur and the traveller Ibn Battutah crossed the river. The town and whatever remained of the fleeing population were spared by Timur during his bloodthirsty march in 1398 out of respect for the holy saint who lay buried here.

When Guru Nanak arrived at Pakpattan, Shaikh Ibrahim, twelfth in descent from Shaikh Farid, held charge of the shrine sacred to the famous Sufi faqir. Like his predecessor, he lived a pious and austere life and was on this account known among his followers as Farid II. In the Janamsakhis he has been called Shaikh Brahm (shortened from Ibrahim), or Shaikh Farid. As was customary with him, Shaikh Ibrahim spent most of his time outside in the waste sitting in meditation and imposing upon himself a severe religious discipline. Guru Nanak's visit came at a time when he was under such a penance. So the Guru had to go into the jungle to meet him. The Janamsakhis, especially *Puratan*, describe in a mixture of poetic metaphor and philosophy the discourse which took place between them.

On seeing Guru Nanak in the ordinary attire of a householder, Shaikh Ibrahim remarked :

Covet either the world, or covet Allah, the Creator!
Set not thy feet on two boats,
Lest thou drownest all thy goods.

The Guru answered :

Set thy feet on both boats;
In both ship thy goods.

added to the name of the town to mark the sanctity which it had gained from the tomb of Shaikh Farid it contained. See *Gazetteer of the Montgomery District* (1883), p. 28.

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A boat will sink, a boat will go across.
For those who deal in true, everlasting goods,
There is no ocean, no boats, no drowning, no loss.⁵

He told the Shaikh that to gain the Divine one need not disown the world. In discovering harmony between the two lay the way to attainment. The body would perish, but the other boat, the soul, could be saved by living in the world in the spirit of a true seeker.

But the Shaikh was not convinced and recited this couplet :

If thou dost not rid thyself of this witch,
The world, says Farid, will keep thee attached to falsehood.
The field is laid waste while one looketh on.

The Guru said, "O Farid, love for the witch hath existed from the very beginning. But if the guardian would be attentive, the field need not be ruined."

The Shaikh realized that he had met a true Enlightener. He changed his tone and uttered the following couplet :

My body is feeble, my heart is broken,
and all strength is gone from me.
Become thou my physician, beloved,
be thou my restorer and healer!

The Guru repeated the advice which would have sounded familiar to the ears of the Sufi saint, "Know thy True Friend. He is in thy own heart. The Beloved is not far from thee."

But Shaikh Ibrahim spoke in a vein of despair the following stanza :

I fitted not the raft when there was time to do so.
And now when the ocean waves lash in full fury,
it is hopeless to swim across.

⁵This is from the *Janamsakhi*, and not from Guru Nanak's own sayings in the Guru Granth.

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Milk once drawn will not return to the udder;
so the soul once sundered will not unite again.
Friends, saith Farid, the Spouse will call.
And, then, the swan shall depart
leaving the body a heap of dust.⁶

Guru Nanak uttered the following *shabad* :

On the raft of thy devotion
Thou shalt cross unobstructed the ocean.
There will then be no water, nor flooding;
And easy will be thy passage.

* * * * *

If thou hast virtue in thy knapsack,
He must needs unite thee unto Himself.
United thus,
Thou hast no fear of separation.
Births and deaths cease,
And thou abidest in the True One.
She, who hath abandoned egotism,
Is fitly decked to meet the Bridegroom.
She, who hath listened to the Guru's word,
Will be rewarded with the Lord's favour.
The Lord, saith Nanak, is so truly dear to us.
We are His maid-slaves, friends!
And He is our Spouse True!!⁷

Thus the conversation went on, and, as says the *Janam-sakhi*, Guru Nanak and the Shaikh remained in the jungle the whole night. A villager fetched from his home a bowl

⁶Guru Granth, *Suhi*, p. 794. This is from the compositions of Ibrahim's predecessor Farid I which were entered in the Sikh Scripture when it was compiled by Guru Arjun. The Janamsakhis are silent on this point, but it could perhaps be speculated that Farid's compositions were, on this occasion or at a subsequent meeting with Ibrahim, inscribed by Guru Nanak in the book which he was believed to carry with him. This book, no longer extant, or a copy made from it, might have been one of the sources utilized by Guru Arjun in preparing the Granth.

⁷Guru Granth, *Suhi*, p. 729.

RETURN TO TALWANDI

filled with milk. He secretly put four gold coins into the basin and left it near the Shaikh's seat. The Shaikh, who slept but little and started his meditation after the Guru lay down to rest, poured half of the milk into his tumbler and drank it. In the morning, while offering the Guru his share of the milk, he referred to his own good fortune in self-congratulatory terms, "They who keep awake obtain the Lord's gifts."

"Of God's bounty none can tell," said the Guru. "Some miss it while awake. Some are awakened from their sleep by Him and have themselves overwhelmed with gifts." The Guru then asked the Shaikh to see what lay at the bottom of the bowl.

When the villager returned in the morning, he found that the holy saints had left. But his bowl lay there and as he, says the *Janamsakhi*, lifted it he saw that it had turned into gold and was full of gold mohurs. Then he began to regret it and said to himself, "They were men of God. If I had so desired I could have obtained from them the eternal truth. I came with a worldly wish and the world alone I secured."⁸

Guru Nanak and Mardana resumed the journey homeward. As they approached Talwandi and as the familiar, dusty village skyline rose into view, Guru Nanak paused and sat down. Mardana, anxious to go into the village without delay, begged leave to proceed and see whether his family were alive, or starved to death in his absence for want of a supporter. The Guru laughed and said, "Don't be anxious. The Lord is the supporter and preserver of all. But if you wish, go and visit your family."

Mardana made obeisance by touching the Guru's feet and took leave of him. He eagerly walked across the well-worn

⁸*Puratan*, p. 51.

track and arrived in the courtyard of his house. His family could not believe their eyes when they saw Mardana's lean figure emerge on a sudden from nowhere, as it were. However, news spread through the village that Mardana, the *dum*, had come. Many people soon assembled in his house. They touched his feet and said, "He is the very shadow of Guru Nanak. He is no longer what he was. He has become greater than the world."⁹ Mardana went to Guru Nanak's house. No sooner did Mother Tripta see him than tears broke loose from her eyes. "Son Mardana," she spoke anxiously, "where is my Nanak? Where have you left him? What news have you of him?" All the neighbours collected in Father Kalu's house to hear what Mardana had to tell about the Guru.

"When the Master was in Sultanpur, this *dum* was with him," said Mardana. "Where he went after that I know not." Mardana said no more and evaded all enquiries. Then he got up and walked out of the yard.

It occurred to Mother Tripta that Mardana's sudden departure from amidst the gathering could not have been without a reason. So she quickly wrapped in a bundle some clothes and sweets and followed the direction in which he had gone. Both thus arrived at the spot where Guru Nanak was. As he saw his mother, the Guru rose from his seat and greeted her by saluting her feet. Mother Tripta wept for joy and said, "May I be a sacrifice, may I be a sacrifice to thee, son. May I be a sacrifice to thy name and to thy sight. May I be a sacrifice to the tracks thou hast trodden and to the very ground on which thou now standest. Thou hast made me happy by showing me thy face." Father Kalu had, meanwhile, heard the news in the village and came as fast as his horse could carry him. Guru Nanak paid his respects

⁹*Puratan*, pp. 56-57.

by touching his feet. Father Kalu was solaced in his heart to see him and felt very proud as he led his long-parted son back to his house.

Large numbers of people from Talwandi and the neighbouring villages began to arrive to see the Guru and request instruction. The Guru said little besides enjoining everyone who came to cherish faith in the One Formless Creator and strive for the righteous deed. His simple words went to the hearts of the listeners. They returned from his presence comforted and enriched. The Guru spent some time daily with Rai Bular, his earliest admirer, who was now far advanced in years. Whenever Mardana was among his own friends, he regaled them with stories of his adventures in strange, far-off territories.

After a short stay at Talwandi, Guru Nanak proceeded to Sultanpur. Here he arrived in the winter of 1509.¹⁰ Thus ended the first of the four major series of the Guru's travels. The journey extended over a period of thirteen years. For Sister Nanaki and Jairam, Guru Nanak's return to Sultanpur was an event worth great rejoicing. Their happiness was shared by Nawab Daulat Khan and many of the Guru's Sikhs and disciples who continuously came to do homage and renew their faith. The Guru was joined in Sultanpur by his wife and sons.

¹⁰Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 222.

CHAPTER XI

JOURNEY TO CEYLON

THE Guru set forth from Sultanpur once again crossing the river Beas towards the north-west at the ferry of Goindwal. On the outskirts of a village on the other bank, he knocked at the door of a solitary hut and was admitted by its lone occupant—a begging faqir diseased with leprosy. When he learned that his visitor sought to spend the night with him, the faqir said, “Benevolent Sire, even beasts of the jungle flee from me. This is God’s own favour that thou comest into my poor hut.” The Guru remained there and recited this hymn, “He who forgets God’s word suffers like one in chronic sickness. His soul is in continuous agony. Great is his torment and bewilderment. But lament is vain, for He knows our innermost, unuttered thoughts—He who is the creator and preserver of all! Those who depart hence with spots of sin on them will find no place in the Lord’s court. Those who are favoured of God utter His name. They are saved. The Lord takes care of those in suffering. Beneficent is the Lord Who rescues those that seek Him.”¹

“By the Guru’s compassionate look,” says the *Janamsakhi*, “the faqir was rid of the disease. His body was made whole. He fell at the Guru’s feet and became a votary of the Name. Then, the Baba went along the way.”²

The Guru continued the journey towards the north-

¹Guru Granth, *Dhanasari*, p. 661.

²*Puratan*, p. 67.

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west. Passing through Vairowal and Jalalabad, he came to Kiri Pathana. The Muslim population of this village which was of Pathan origin listened to his teaching and had faith. At Windpur the population blamed him for renouncing the customs of his family and would not allow him to remain in the village. In Lahore, he was made welcome in the home of a wealthy merchant Duni Chand who was observing the anniversary feast for his deceased father. At this ceremony, called *sharadh*, Brahmans were entertained in Hindu families and the food served to them was supposed to reach the departed spirits. Upon Duni Chand's door were fastened seven flags each worth a lakh of rupees. When questioned by the Guru, his host told him that the flags signified the size of the fortune he had been able to amass. Thereupon, says the *Janamsakhi*, the Guru gave him a needle and said, "Keep it as a deposit of mine. We shall take it from you in the next world." Puzzled to hear this strange request, Duni Chand brought the needle to his wife and told her what the Guru had said. "What is to be done now?" he asked her. "Go and give the needle back to the Guru," replied his wife. "Who can take anything with him from here?"

Duni Chand came and bowed at the feet of the Guru. He knew that his wealth would not go with him, nor would the victuals ritually offered to the Brahmans on the *sharadh* day avail his father. The Guru said to him, "Give in the name of the Lord. Put food in the mouth of the needy. Thus wilt thou have something to go with thee."³ Duni Chand took the faith and dedicated himself to the Guru's word.

The Guru briefly visited Talwandi and Saidpur and came to the ancient town of Sialkot, in the north, near the Himalayan foothills. As he took his seat under a *ber* tree,⁴ he learned

³*Puratan*, p. 83.

⁴The tree is still preserved. There is a Sikh shrine on the site known as Ber Baba

that a Sufi faqir, Hamza Ghaus, had laid the town under a curse of destruction and was undergoing a *chaliha*, or forty-day self-mortification, for the accomplishment of the doom he had invoked for the citizens. The reason for his wrath was the failure of a Kashatriya inhabitant, Ganga, to keep a promise solemnly given him. Ganga was childless and had sought the blessing of the faqir saying that, if he had children, he would present his first-born son to him as his disciple. There were three sons born to Ganga, but he was not willing to fulfil his word and desired absolution from the pledge with offers of money. This had enraged Hamza Ghaus who now fasted confined to the solitariness of a small vaulted room intent on punishing the city of liars. The Guru attempted to meet the faqir, but every time Mardana was sent away by his attendants who dared not interrupt his vowed penance.

The forty anxious days for the populace passed. The faqir emerged from his cellar and went to see the Guru. He was still full of anger. The Guru said that he must not blame the sins of one person upon all the inhabitants among whom there might also be some good and wise men. To make a test the Guru sent Mardana into town to purchase one farthing's worth of truth and one farthing's worth of falsehood. Mardana went from shop to shop showing the slips the Guru had given him. His strange quest mystified the people, but there was one shopkeeper, Moola by name, who took the slips from him. On the back of one he wrote, "Life is a lie," and on the other, "Death is the truth." These answers mollified Hamza Ghaus. He saw that everyone in the town did not deserve the fate he had wished to impose on it.

Nanak, or Ber Sahib. Until the partition of the Punjab in 1947, when Sialkot became part of the new State of Pakistan, there was a big annual fair held at the shrine on the 1st of Baisakh (mid-April). See *Gazetteer of the Sialkot District* (1883), p. 37.

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Moola's curiosity led him to follow Mardana. He felt contented to find himself in the Guru's presence and became a devotee.

Walking from village to village, Guru Nanak made his way back to Sultanpur. He was now prepared to embark on his second *udasi*, or long preaching odyssey, which began in 1510.

The Guru crossed the river Sutlej to the south and arrived at Bhatinda, long before the capital of a powerful Punjab kingdom. A shrine outside the town preserves the memory of his brief sojourn. This was also the site of a visit nearly two hundred years later by Guru Gobind Singh, tenth in succession from him. From Bhatinda the Guru journeyed on to Sirsa⁵ and remained there more than four months in the company of Muslim Sufis reputed for their occult prowess. The Guru manifested to them how perfection in compassion and piety became a saint more than did the secret powers. At Bikaner, further south-west, he visited a Jain monastery. The priest questioned him if he ate old or new corn. He affirmed that he who ate new and full grain, drank cold and unstrained water and shook the trees of the forest to eat their fruit destroyed life and would never attain pardon. The Guru said that forgiveness was in the

⁵Giani Gyan Singh (*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 223) says that Guru Nanak arrived at Sirsa on 14 Har, 1567 Bk, corresponding to June 11, 1510, and remained there for four months and eleven days. This, according to him, was attested by a diary of the Bhattas, wandering pedigree-keepers and minstrels. The record is not traceable now, but, if Giani Gyan Singh's testimony is accepted, it would be one of the three or four firmly established dates of Guru Nanak's career. The Bhattas went from village to village in their respective districts reciting chronicles of their patrons and recording events such as births and marriages in their families. These Bhatt diaries, along with the registers of the Pandas, or priests, at Hardwar, who have over the centuries made similar entries regarding the families that send the earthly remains of their dead for immersion in the river Ganges, comprise records which are of considerable sociological and historical importance, but have not yet attracted much scholarly attention.

GURU NANAK

hands of the Almighty and made this hymn :

By the Lord's grace faith is fulfilled;
by the Lord's grace sorrows are remitted.
By the Lord's grace suffering is ended;
by the Lord's grace divine bliss is obtained.
By the Lord's grace the fear of death is annulled;
by the Lord's grace happiness everlasting is secured.
By the Lord's grace the nine treasures are accumulated;
by the Lord's grace truth is realized.⁶

Further on the Guru said, "God alone createth and preserveth. None else may claim to be the protector. Some abstain from the use of water and go without bath to avoid hurting living creatures. They grope in darkness."

The next important halt was at Ajmer. Here the Guru visited the mausoleum of Khwaja Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti of Sistan and discoursed with leaders of the Sufi order founded by him. At Pushkar, four miles to the west, he preached to pilgrims assembled for the festival of Baisakhi. The Guru's course was now set towards the south and all Janamsakhis, except Meharban's,⁷ relate that he travelled as far as Ceylon. They do not make out the itinerary nor give any details of the journey. But, according to later sources, such as Giani Gyan Singh's *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* and Khazan Singh's *History and Philosophy of the Sikh Religion*, the Guru passed through such towns as Nasirabad, Abu, Ujjain, Indore, Hoshangabad, Burhanpur, Amravati, Hin-

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A Raja, or chief, in Ceylon, whose name, according to the Janamsakhis, was Shivrabh,⁹ had long entertained in his heart a wish to see the Guru. He had heard about him from Mansukh, one of the Guru's Sikhs, who had travelled from the Punjab to the south with his merchandise. Mansukh's peculiar customs had been noticed by his neighbours and reported to the Raja. "The trader," says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, "rose a watch before daybreak and bathed in cold water. After his bath he recited the *Japuji* and read hymns inscribed in his book. By sunrise he was ready and went out for worldly business. When he returned in the evening, he sang the Guru's *shabads*. The people among whom he lived washed after sunrise. They made offerings to the goddess, kept fasts and worshipped the idols. This trader did not fast or adore images in the temple, nor did he observe Sunday or *Amavas*, the moonless night. The local Hindus treated him as an outcaste."¹⁰ Complaints reached the Raja that a merchant had come who, though known as a Hindu, was a slur on the Hindu religion.

The merchant was summoned by the Raja and questioned, "Thou art born a Hindu and thou dost not attend to the acts of thy religion. Why dost thou not do so?" Mansukh answered, "Sir, what shall I do with these rituals? I have

these exist in works such as Tara Singh Narotam's *Gur Tirath Sangrah* (1884), which contains brief descriptions of the Sikh Gurdwaras raised in memory of the Gurus, and Giani Gyan Singh's *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*. But most of them have since fallen into disuse or disappeared owing to lack of local Sikh populations.

⁹At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the island of Ceylon was split into three kingdoms, i.e., Jaffna, Kotte and Kandy. None of them had a king by the name of Shivrabh. Both Kotte and Kandy were Buddhist kingdoms consisting of Sinhalese populations. Jaffna, in the north, was inhabited by Hindu Tamils and, owing to its proximity to the Malabar coast, had throughout history received currents of Indian immigrants including martial and mercantile elements from the Indo-Gangetic regions. Shivrabh, not a reigning king, was perhaps a tributary chieftain.

¹⁰P. 88.

found what I had been seeking.” “What hast thou found that thou speakest in such triumph?” asked the Raja. “I have,” said the trader, “been favoured of the Perfect One. In seeing him my bonds are severed.” Mansukh’s account made Raja Shivnabh desirous of seeing the Guru. Mansukh, says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, assured him that, if he wished it in his heart, the Guru must one day visit his city to see him.¹¹ Since that day the Raja had awaited the Guru’s coming.

From Rameswaram the Guru took vessel for the opposite coast of Ceylon. The two disciples Saido and Siho¹² of a *jat* tribe who, according to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, had accompanied him from the Punjab on this journey asked how the bottomless ocean would be crossed. The Guru told them to repeat the *slok*, the preamble to the *Japuji* : There is but one God. He is all that is. He is the Creator of all things and He is all-pervasive. He is without fear and without enmity. He is timeless, unborn and self-existent. He is the Enlightener, and can be realized by grace of Himself alone. He was in the beginning ; He was in all ages. The True One is, was, O Nanak, and shall forever be. “In whose mouth,” said the Guru, “this *slok* will be and who will continue reading it and as many people after him will hear it, they will all cross the ocean unhindered.”¹³

As the Guru and his attendants took up their dwelling-place in Raja Shivnabh’s garden, news spread through the city of the arrival of a holy man from a far country. It struck the Raja that the Guru himself might have come as foretold by his Sikh. But before he would believe he made certain tests. When he was assured that it was none other

¹¹P. 89.

¹²These names are mentioned only in relation to this journey, and nowhere before or afterwards. Even if these disciples accompanied the Guru to the south, they must be in addition to Mardana, the favourite minstrel and companion.

¹³*Puratan*, p. 100.

JOURNEY TO CEYLON

than the one whom he had awaited, he felt greatly pleased. He went to the park where the Guru was, made salutation at his feet and sought knowledge of the mystery of existence. The Guru recited this *shabad* :

Where doth he go and whence cometh?
What bringeth him here and what absorbeth him in the end?
How is he enmeshed and how released?
How is he united with the Eternal?
He who treasureth the Name in his heart
and repeateth it on his lips;
He who dwelleth in the Name becometh free from attachment
like the Lord.
By the Lord's order he cometh,
by His order departeth.
From ego he ariseth and in ego he stayeth.
He who surrendereth himself to God's will gaineth release
and remaineth not in bondage.
He meditateth on the Word and practiseth the Name
and thus findeth deliverance.
Like birds flocking to the trees at night,
men come into this world.
Some repose in peace while others abide in distress.
Their eyes wander across the skies,
And they roam ceaselessly caught in the cycle of their deeds.
Those joined to the Name regard this world
as the grazier's hut in the rain-grown pasture,
And they overcome their passion and anger.
Without God's remembrance life is empty.
The Guru's word cancels ignorance.
Man meeteth such a one if he is so destined.
Those dedicated to Hari rejoice in truth;
To His will they submit themselves.
I, saith Nanak, would take to the feet of such men.¹⁴

Raja Shivrabh, along with his wife and son, entered the path of discipleship. So did some of the populace. At the

¹⁴Guru Granth, *Gauri*, pp. 152-53.

Guru's instance, the Raja established a *dharamsala* where the faithful assembled by night to pray and recite hymns in praise of God. Before they dispersed one of the disciples would, says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, proclaim an invitation and the following day all went to his house to partake of his hospitality.

While in Ceylon, Guru Nanak is said to have uttered Pransangali,¹⁵ a metrical composition in twenty-one stanzas

¹⁵When Guru Arjun began to collect the sayings of his predecessors for inclusion in the Scripture, a Sikh by the name of Bhai Paira was sent to Ceylon in search of this composition. The copy that he brought was not regarded as genuine by the Guru and was thus excluded from the sacred volume he was compiling. Bhai Paira's journey to the south, however, lends support to the tradition about Guru Nanak's visit to Ceylon. On his return to the Punjab, Bhai Paira narrated the details of his travels which were recorded in brief outline by a contemporary Sikh, Bhai Banno. This account has come to us as *Haqiqat Rah Muqam Shivrabh Raje ki* ("Experiences of a Journey to the country of Raja Shivrabh") appended to the copy of the Guru Granth transcribed by Bhai Banno, and some other copies of the Granth made later, and mentions some of the places in the South which preserved the memories of Guru Nanak's visit. According to *Haqiqat Rah Muqam*, there was a Sikh *sangat* in Jaffnapattam as well as a *dharamsala* and community *langar* at the time of Bhai Paira's visit which took place nearly a century after Guru Nanak's. Bhai Paira is said to have met the grandson of Raja Shivrabh. But the name mentioned is that of Mayadunne, who was the Sinhalese ruler of a portion of the kingdom of Kotte. Mayadunne was a dramatic figure and had seen several vicissitudes of fortune. He fought against the Portuguese and his own brother who ruled over Kotte. He invited the Muslims from the Coromandal coast to help him against the Portuguese and spent some time in South India as an exile. Maybe, this name, then well known, crept by error into the account as recorded by Bhai Banno. However, the Sikh traces in Jaffna to which this account bears witness were lost soon afterwards in the political and religious turmoil following the occupation of the peninsula by the Portuguese.

A memory of Guru Nanak's sojourn in Ceylon has been traced recently by Kirpal Singh (*vide*, his unpublished report submitted to the Punjabi University, Patiala, on his tour of the country) who says that ten miles to the south of Batticaloa, formerly Mattakallappo, in the east of the island, there is a small village called Kurukul Mandal. The village has an old temple whose priest told him that it was named after a *Jagat-Guru*, or world teacher, who visited the site some 450 years ago. Conjecture has been made that the name of the village is a corrupted form of *Gurukul Math*, implying a reference to the Guru. Giani Gyan Singh (*Twarikh*

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describing the state of true religious discernment. A written script was made by Saido and left with Raja Shivnabh. The composition is not included in the Guru Granth and the text now available is generally considered apocryphal.

On his way back, Guru Nanak crossed the Palk Strait and arrived at Nagapattinam, travelling thence to the Western Ghats, via Tanjore, Trichnopoly and Palghat. The rest of the journey was along the coast, or very close to it, through places such as Kumta, Ankola, Dharwar, Nasik, Ankleswar, Baroda, Palitana, Somnath, Madhopur, Junagarh, Porbandar, Dwarka and Bhuj. Along with these more important and better known towns, some of them famous as centres of pilgrimage, the Guru travelled across number-

Guru Khalsa, p. 268) mentions that Raja Shivnabh whom Guru Nanak visited lived in Mattiakalam, which is the same as Mattakallappo or Batticaloa. This will be contrary, so far as the site is concerned, to the conclusion derivable from the earlier account, of Bhai Paira, which refers to Jaffna, in the north, as the country where Guru Nanak met the Raja. Giani Gyan Singh's account, read with Kirpal Singh's statement, will, however, agree with Bhai Paira's so far as the name of the ruler in whose time he visited Ceylon is concerned. Bhai Paira mentions the name of Mayadunne as the contemporary ruler. Mayadunne was at that time one of the kings in eastern Ceylon and could, chronologically, have been the third in succession, as described by Bhai Paira, from the ruler Guru Nanak met. The point cannot satisfactorily be resolved unless the identity of the ruler whose name was somehow introduced into the Sikh tradition as Shivnabh is correctly established. However, on the basis of the tradition that has come down it can be upheld with a degree of certainty that Guru Nanak's, southern tour took him as far as Ceylon. The latest support for this comes from a reading, by Dr S. Paranavitana, formerly Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, of the Sanskrit inscription on an old slab preserved in the Archaeological Museum at Anuradhapura. The inscription is said to have been made by order of King Dharmaparakramabahu of Kotte who came to the throne in 1493 and refers to the visit to him of a religious teacher named Jnanakacarya and his debates with the spokesmen of Buddhism and Brahmanism. To the Buddhist he spoke about the Supreme Personal Deity and the eternal soul and to the Brahman about image-worship and ritualism—subjects which would have been Guru Nanak's choice in any similar situation. See unpublished paper entitled "Guru Nanak and Ceylon," presented by Dr Saddhamangala Karunaratna at the Seminar on the Guru's Life and Teachings at Punjabi University, Patiala, September 1969. ●

less small, anonymous villages showing to many the way of truth.

The last stage of the journey, before the Guru reached the south-west Punjab, was through Rajputana. Traversing the sandy desert, he arrived at the town of Uch, on the eastern bank of the Panjnad, sacred to the Sufi saint, Jalal Bukhari, and preached his message to the Shaikh, then in charge of his ancestor's shrine. The Shaikh's descendants have preserved with honour some relics of Guru Nanak's visit and exhibit these to visiting pilgrims. The relics include a stone bangle and a pair of wooden sandals said to have belonged to the Guru.

The Guru then proceeded in the north-eastern direction and reached Multan. In this ancient town there lived at that time many Sufi faqirs. It also contained shrines and mausoleums¹⁶ of several eminent saints such as Shaikh Muhammad Yusuf Gardezi (*d.* 1114) and Shaikh Baha-ud-Din Zikaria (*d.* 1266) and their descendants and successors. When they learned about the Guru's arrival, the *pirs* of Multan, says Bhai Gurdas,¹⁷ came out and met him with a bowl overflowing to the edge with milk. By this gesture they meant to say that the place was already full of religious teachers. The Guru laid upon the milk-bowl a jasmine petal indicating that he would still find room for himself without unsettling the others. And the Guru, says Bhai Gurdas, mingled there as do the waters of the Ganges and the sea.

Travelling eastward, Guru Nanak came once again to Pakpattan, the seat of Shaikh Ibrahim, or Farid II, whom he had met earlier while returning from his *udasi* to the east. He halted outside the town and was absorbed in reciting

¹⁶Besides graves and faqirs, the two other things for which Multan is proverbially known are the heat and sandstorms.

¹⁷*Var* I, 44.

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divine praises when the Shaikh's disciple, Kamal, wandered in that direction collecting fuel for the kitchen of his master. The disciple was drawn by the melodious song and, leaving the firewood, came near to listen. He heard the couplet, "Thou art the writer, Thou the slate and Thou art the writing upon it. Remember the One alone, for there is none other besides Him." He was so much taken up by this verse that, repeating it on his lips, he returned to his master. To him he narrated his adventure and said, "Pir, health to thee! There is a true beloved of God I have met."

From the couplet that was spoken by Kamal, Shaikh Ibrahim judged that Guru Nanak was in his country again. He said to his disciple, "Son, by whom this verse has been uttered, his sight I have obtained already. He is a faqir of God and words of God are spoken by him. Bring me also to him!"¹⁸ And he promptly proceeded to welcome the Guru.

As they sat down after mutual salutations, Shaikh Ibrahim said to the Guru, "Thou sayest that there is One alone and none other besides Him. God is one, but there are two ways. Which shall one accept and which reject? The Hindus say that the truth is with them and the Musalmans say that the truth is with them. Who is right and who is wrong?"

The Guru answered, "There is one God and one way. Accept the One Lord and reject all else."

The Shaikh then quoted a verse from Farid I, "Tear thy coat to shreds and let a tattered blanket be thy only apparel. Put on the clothes in which thou mayest obtain the Bridegroom."¹⁹ "It is not necessary for one," said the Guru, "to tear one's coat and take a religious garb. Men who live in their houses and work in their ordinary costumes shall find the Lord if they fix their hearts on Him."

¹⁸*Puratan*, p. 62.

¹⁹Guru Granth, *Slok Farid*, p. 1383.

The Shaikh gave expression to another of his misgivings in the words of his predecessor, "When she was young she courted not the spouse. Then she grew old and departed. And now she crieth out from the grave, 'O I met not my Lord.'" Then he asked, "What is that word, what that virtue, what is the charm that I may acquire? What dress shall I wear so that I could win the Beloved?"²⁰

As says the *Janamsakhi*, the Guru made the answer in Farid's own *slok*, "Humility is the word, forgiveness the virtue and sweetness of tongue the charm. If thou clothest thyself with these three, thine shall be the Beloved."

After some further discourse, the Shaikh rose and kissed the Guru's hands and, in the words of the *Janamsakhi*, said, "Nanak thou hast found God. Between Him and thee there is no difference. Grant that I may see the Lord's favour, too!"²¹ The Guru said, "Thou hast God's blessing. Safely will thy cargo come through."

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1384.

²¹*Puratan*, p. 65.

CHAPTER XII

UDASI TO THE NORTH

IN leaving Pakpattan, the Guru turned into the interior of the Punjab. Teaching in village after village as he went along, he reached Talwandi. For his aged parents whose eyes had been dimmed with waiting it was a moment of unbelievable joy. The little village outgrew its obscurity and visitors began to pour in as news of the Guru's return spread. The ailing Rai Bular had his final wish fulfilled when the Guru called at his house to see him. He had but a short time to live and felt comforted by the sight of him during his last days. The Guru was by his bedside when he died.

The Guru then proceeded to Sultanpur to see his sister Nanaki. With this journey ended his second *udasi*. The year was 1515.

Sultanpur, in some ways, had even stronger attraction for Guru Nanak than Talwandi. First was the spontaneous, undemanding affection of his sister and her husband Jairam; then, the bonds established with the common populace by his work in the granary and his holy instruction. In Sultanpur he had lived with his family, made disciples and contemplated the duty he was to fulfil. Here was the rivulet Bein on whose calm banks he had performed his meditations and received the divine errand to carry his teaching abroad. Surrounded by old memories and in the midst of disciples and followers, the Guru remained in Sultanpur until his mission called him to leave again. Nanaki never attempted

to intervene in her brother's plans, but Nawab Daulat Khan besought him, now even more urgently than before, that he dwell permanently in his city and preach the word from there. The Guru said that as God willed so would it happen. Then he took his farewell of the Nawab and set foot out of Sultanpur once again.

Travelling northwards through Majha, the country between the rivers Beas and Ravi, the Guru arrived at Pakhoke to visit his family who had been in the charge of his wife's parents. During his stay in this vicinity he was so attracted by a spot across the Ravi that he chose it for his abode. Ajita Randhawa of Pakhoke, who had become a disciple, awaited any chance of serving the Master, and with some other farmers pledged him the land. On this site, the Guru founded a village and called it Kartarpur, the City of the Creator.¹

As the Guru sat down here, says the *Janamsakhi*, "the news went abroad. Whoever heard came. People said that God's own saint had arisen. Nanak was his name and he remained assimilated with God always. Many came to see him; many took his instruction. Whoever came was blessed. Whatever the Guru said came to pass. He uttered the words: What is not true will perish; truth alone is everlasting. Holy men recite these words with their instruments.

"In Nanak's home, it is One God's name that is adored.

¹The *Puratan* places the founding of Kartarpur at the conclusion of the Guru's first *udasi* (p. 85 and p. 89) and *Meharban* at the conclusion of his last (p. 516). While it is commonly agreed that the Guru settled down at Kartarpur after his last major journey, the village may have been founded by him earlier. No dates have been mentioned by the *Janamsakhis*, but later sources (Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 298, and Sahib Singh, "Jiwan Britant Guru Nanak Devji" in *Alochna*, July–September 1967, p. 82) assign the event to the beginning of the year 1516. This is, according to the present narrative, after the Guru's second *udasi*. The *Puratan* version places the event too early in his career and has been considered unacceptable.

UDASI TO THE NORTH

Much was the praise given him and pure and great was his repute. The Hindu, the Musalman, the yogi, the anchorite, the celibate, the ascetic, the Digambar, the Vaishnavite, the householder, the chief, the nobleman, the courtier, the rankholder, the peasant and the landlord—whoever came was pleased. Everyone rendered him honour and praise.”²

The *Janamsakhi* relates the story of a Karoria,³ holding a rank in the district, who felt ill at ease to hear reports of the Guru’s growing fame. “Who is this one born in the world that everybody acclaims?” he said to himself. “He had misguided the Hindus, and now he is injuring the faith of the Muslims, too. For, how true can be the faith of that Musalman who believes on a Hindu? I must go and put him in bondage.” But as he mounted his horse, the animal suddenly shied away. Next day while riding out, he, says the *Janamsakhi*, “lost his sight. Baffled and distressed, he dismounted and sat down on the ground. Then the people said to him, ‘Sir, we dared not speak to you, but Nanak is a great *pir*. You should reverence his name.’ The Karoria then began praising the Guru. The people who stood by lowered their heads in obeisance. But as he mounted the horse again, he could see nothing and fell down. The people spoke again, ‘Sir, you err in riding the horse. Nanak is a great *pir*. You should walk that you be pardoned.’ The Karoria, thereupon, went on foot. As he sighted the Guru’s huts, he stopped to pay homage with a bow. As he reached the spot, he fell at his feet. The Guru blessed him. He kept him for three days and made him happy.”⁴ The Karoria, Duni Chand in later chronicles, built the *dharamsala* and helped in the establishment of the habitation around it in several other ways.

²*Puratan*, p. 85.

³Literally, one who is worth a *karor*, or ten million, of rupees.

⁴*Puratan*, p. 86.

GURU NANAK

As more homes were constructed at Kartarpur, the Guru's parents and family came to live there. Mardana also brought his family from Sultanpur.

There came one day a learned Brahman to visit the Guru. He was hungry and needed something to eat. It was meal-time for the Guru and he invited the Brahman to join him. But he replied that he would not eat food cooked by others in a common *langar*. He would only eat what he had cooked himself. "I shall," he said, "first dig up the ground a cubit deep and consecrate a cooking square. I shall dig up another cubit to make a hearth and wash firewood before using it. I do not know how this food has been cooked; so I will not eat it." The Guru said, "Bring him a supply of uncooked rations." The Brahman went out with the provisions and started digging to make a fireplace in the prescribed way. But wherever he dug he struck bones. He kept digging all day but did not find a clean spot. When he had become exhausted, he said within himself, "I must return to the Guru." He came and threw himself at the Guru's feet. "May I be given food," he begged. "I am dying of hunger."⁵

The Guru was pleased to gratify him. The following *shabad* was uttered on this occasion :

Were there a kitchen-square paved with gold
and of gold be the pots and pans,
Were the square be marked with silver lines extending far,
Were the water be from the Ganges
and the fire from the sacrificial *yajna*,
Were the food be dipped in milk
and deliciously tender to the palate,
Of little account will all these be,
If the mind is absorbed not in the True Name.

⁵The *Puratan*, the only Janamsakhi which contains this *sakhi*, locates it in Talwandi, after the Guru's return from his first *udasi*. The *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* locates it in Kartarpur (p. 379).

UDASI TO THE NORTH

If one possessed the eighteen Puranas
and could recite the four Vedas by heart,
If one made pilgrimages to bathe on holy festivals
and gave alms in accord with one's caste,
If one fasted and performed the prescribed ceremonies,
Or became one a Qazi, a Mullah, or a Shaikh,
A yogi, or a Jangam, in ochre dress,
or a householder precise in religious ritual—

Without realization, all will be taken away in bondage.
By our acts we shall be judged.

Foolish and ignorant are they who seek to impose their authority.
He alone, saith Nanak, is true,
And His praise is my wealth.*

The Guru resided at Kartarpur for a few months receiving disciples and establishing the way of living together in faith. Early in the summer of 1517, he started on his third long journey travelling far into the Himalayas. From Kartarpur he and his faithful minstrel Mardana trekked north to Sialkot and, thence, on to Jammu over the lower hill ranges. Wandering in this region and the valley of Kashmir, the Guru met groups of devotees out on pilgrimage to the cave-temple of Amarnath in the high mountains. He went preaching the worship of One Supreme Lord and the path of faith, amity and service. Many people turned votaries of the Name. The Janamsakhis allude specially to the conversion of a learned Brahman called Brahm Das.

Brahm Das was proud of his learning and, as he heard of the arrival of a holy man, he came in his accustomed manner with packs of classical volumes amounting to two camel-loads and with a stone-idol suspended from his neck. No sooner had he uttered his greeting than he began questioning the Guru on how he clad himself, what ritual he observed

*Guru Granth, *Basant*, p. 1169.

and what food he ate. The Guru spoke this *shabad*, "There is but one highway and there is one entrance. The Guru is the ladder to reach one's native home. Handsome is the Lord and in His name lieth all comfort. He created Himself and Himself He recognizeth. He created the sky and the earth and separated them by making one the canopy for the other. Thus was His word made manifest. He supported the skies without pillars. He created the sun and the moon and gave them His light. He made night and day; marvellous is His creation. His are the pilgrimages, His the holy converse and His the festive ablution. How can we describe Him? There is nothing to equal Him. The True Lord occupies the eternal throne; the rest but come and go."⁷

Brahm Das whose *forte* was disputation felt disarmed by the Guru's words and manner. He asked him humbly this time how the Lord existed before creation. The Guru uttered the following hymn :

Through aeons past reckoning
utter darkness hung upon misty void;
There were then no worlds or firmaments;
Pervasive infinitely was the Lord's will alone;
There was neither night nor day, neither sun nor moon;
He alone was there
Poised in perfect concentration.
There was neither birth nor speech,
neither air nor water;
There was neither creation nor destruction,
neither coming nor going;
There were neither continents nor worlds below the earth,
There were neither the seven seas nor rivers overflowing with water.
There were not the higher, middle or nether regions,
nor the hell or heaven, nor death the destroyer.
There was neither paradise nor purgatory,
neither birth nor death.

⁷Guru Granth, *Var Malar*, p. 1279.

UDASI TO THE NORTH

There was then no Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva;
There was neither male nor female,
neither caste, nor reincarnation,
neither pain, nor pleasure.

* * * * *

There were neither Mullahs, nor Qazis,
neither Sufis nor their disciples, nor the *hajj*-pilgrims,
There were no mighty sovereigns, nor subjects for them to rule,
no world of ego, no masters or slaves.

* * * * *

There were no Vedas, nor the books of the Semitics,
There were no Simritis and no Shastras,
and no reading of the scriptures by morning or evening.
The Unspeakable One was Himself the speaker,
the Unknowable One had alone the knowledge of Himself.⁸

“Then,” says the *Janamsakhi*, “Brahm Das came and fell down at the Guru’s feet. He flung away the stone-image from his neck and became a disciple.”⁹

Brahm Das was left to look after the disciples in this hill country. At Mattan, 40 miles east of Srinagar and above Martand, the ruins of the ancient temple of the sun, there is a shrine recalling the visit of the Guru and Brahm Das’ meeting with him.

Then, says the *Janamsakhi*, the Guru crossed countless mountain ranges and ascended the Sumer. Sumer is the name of a legendary mountain which in relation to this journey has been identified as Mount Kailash, in Central Asia.¹⁰ In this long and rigorous march across icy wastes and along impassable river-basins, the Guru appears to have taken a north-easterly direction and descended, through the Zoji La, into the valley of Ladakh. On the

⁸Guru Granth, *Maru*, p. 1035. This is reminiscent of the Hymn of Creation in the Rig Veda.

⁹*Puratan*, p. 108.

¹⁰Editor’s note in Santokh Singh’s *Nanak Prakash*, Vol. II, p. 688.

tongues of Buddhist monks and laymen stories have come down of this visit. The town of Leh itself has an old tree under which the Guru is said to have rested. Outside, on the Leh-Kargil road, there is a rock which, according to the legend, contains the petrified trunk of a demon chastised by the Guru.¹¹

Further route seems to have been along the upward course of the river Indus which taking him through places such as Tikse, Thangra, Tashigong, Gartok and Jerko La brought him to the sacred Manasarowar Lake under the shadows of Mount Kailash. Here he met a party of Siddhas, or perfect yogis. All the major Janamsakhis as well as Bhai Gurdas supply accounts of the discourse which took place. Most concise and frequently quoted of these is Bhai Gurdas'. The Siddhas were astonished to see two wayfarers from the earthly world come up so far and, as says Bhai Gurdas, they questioned the Guru with one voice, "Listen, youth! What power is it that hath brought thee hither?"¹² "I worship Lord God alone," replied the Guru. "In His praise do I sit and meditate."

Then the Siddhas asked, "What news hath thee? How doth it fare with the world of the mortals!" The Guru replied, "Darkness overspreads the world, O Naths. The moon of truth is invisible. The earth is seized by sin and groans under the weight of unjustness. The Siddhas have escaped into their mountain caverns. Who will redeem humanity? The kings are corrupted. The fence itself eats up the crop. The people wander in ignorance. The gurus perform dances as the disciples play music. The former visit the latter's houses to make their exactions. The Qazis sell justice for money. Such is the state of the world."¹³

¹¹Lt Kirpal Singh, "Guru Nanak in Ladakh," in *Sikh Review*, August 1966.

¹²*Var I*, 28.

¹³*Var I*, 29.

The Siddhas perceived the Guru's genius and thought that, if he took their garb, he would make their sect famous in the world. They tried to allure him by their miraculous powers and gave him the yogi's bowl to bring water from the lake. As, says Bhai Gurdas, the Guru reached the lake, he saw that in the water lay rubies, diamonds and other precious stones. He returned and informed the Siddhas that there was no water in the lake. They came to see for themselves and found the lake dried up. The Guru's word won the Siddha community and manifested to them the true path.¹⁴

The tradition has persisted about the Guru's peripatetic ministry in the mysterious land of Tibet and has received confirmation recently in the dispatches and reports of Indian military officers posted to the Himalayan borders.¹⁵ The evidence which has thus come through indicates that the journey was continued south-east across the mountains

¹⁴In *Puratan*, this *sakhi* appears in a slightly different version. The bowl that was carried to the lake kept filling with jewels. The Guru broke the spell and filled the vessel with water. Everyone drank of it without diminishing the supply.

¹⁵The *Bala Janamsakhi* describes the Guru's journeys in the mountain regions, but the accounts are overlaid with mythology and legend and yield no exact geographical locations. There has been no contemporary or authentic testimony traced. Besides any indigenous references, a likely source could have been the diaries, reports and letters of Jesuit travellers. The Portuguese missionaries began exploring the country in 1603. In 1624, a Jesuit traveller, Andrade by name, made a pioneer trip into Tibet (C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, pp. 43-68). He was followed by other Jesuit missionaries. However, the local tradition on Guru Nanak's visit to Tibet is fairly widespread. Tarungpa Tulku in his article "Guru Nanak in Tibet" (*Indian Times*, March 6, 1966) says, "In Tibet, Guru Nanak is revered as an emanation of Guru Padamasambhava ... Most Tibetans know that Guru Nanak visited Tibet." Some monasteries in Tibet contain Guru Nanak's images. There he is worshipped as Bhadra Guru, the Great Master. The Tibetans make pilgrimage to Amritsar which, according to them, is the city of the Guru who made sour soapnuts sweet, who discoursed with the Siddhas and who manifested himself in the world ten times. See Editor's note in *Nanak Prakash*, Vol. II, pp. 690-93.

GURU NANAK

into the Himalayan states of Nepal¹⁶ and Sikkim, and from Sikkim further into the Chumbi valley of Tibet, via the Nathu La pass. A small village called Chunthang, in northern Sikkim, has a mound consecrated to the Guru's memory. The popular belief is that *Rimpoche* Nanak Guru stopped here while on his way to Tibet. The story is also related that the Guru had brought with him rice-meal packed in banana leaves. This cereal was unknown to the hillfolk. Noticing their inquisitiveness, the Guru bestowed upon them a share of the meal. But instead of eating it, they sprinkled the rice over the meadow and buried banana leaf in the ground. The seeds, says the story, sprouted. Rice and banana today prosper in that land of maize and apple.¹⁷

¹⁶Giani Gyan Singh (*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 350) mentions even the date of Guru Nanak's arrival in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, though he traces a different route.

¹⁷Maj N. S. Issar, "Guru Nanak's Visit to Tibet," in *Sikh Review*, January 1965.

CHAPTER XIII
PAEANS OF BLOOD

NANAKI now awaited the Guru's arrival in Sultanpur. For her his long absences on *udasis* were filled with constant remembrance of him. She was confident in her heart that her brother, who roamed the far-off lands to show the world the way of truth and to rid it of its suffering, would not fail to visit her when she wished. She had his own assurance for this. The Guru was on his way back and, retracing his steps over the formidable highlands criss-crossed by wild-rushing torrents, had returned to Jammu. From there he came to the plains of the Punjab and, taking the route through Pathankot and Gurdaspur, reached Sultanpur at the beginning of the winter of 1518.¹

For Nanaki his return was like the new moon risen in the skies. But this time her joy was mixed with sadness. When the Guru expressed his wish to leave on the third day, she begged him not to go so soon. Rather it was Nanaki herself who was to haste away. Two days later she fell ill and suddenly breathed her last as the Guru's sacred hymn, the *Japuji*, was being recited to her. Jairam himself did not live much longer, falling victim to a fever three days later. For Guru Nanak this was the last visit to Sultanpur and to the com-

¹Though he marks a different route for the outward journey, Giani Gyan Singh (*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 369) mentions this as the date of the Guru's arrival in Sultanpur. This last stage of the return journey also coincides with his version. Sahib Singh ("Jiwan Britant Guru Nanak Devji" in *Alochna*, October-December 1967, p. 75) gives approximately the same date.

munity of his earliest followers there. Nawab Daulat Khan came to pay homage to the Guru before he left his city. Becoming increasingly involved in the stakes for the throne of Delhi soon afterwards, he was not able to see the Guru again.

Guru Nanak thereon arrived at Kartarpur. The village became the centre for his preaching and served as an exemplar of the way of life he had taught. People came to listen to his doctrine or for a mere sight of him. Many felt in his presence the glow of a new understanding and entered the fold. They returned to their homes to practise in their daily occupations the faith they had taken. Kartarpur thus brought fresh meaning to numerous lives. Yet before it achieved anything like the importance which it was to command later and before the year was out, the Guru set forth on yet another of his long travels. This fourth *udasi* was towards the west. The Guru dressed himself in blue on this occasion and was accompanied, as on previous journeys, by Mardana.

In his travels, says the *Janamsakhi*, wheresoever the Guru met some children he would join their play and share in their fun.² The first part of his journey lay through the south-west Punjab and extended to Multan and from thence forward to Sukkur, on the western bank of the Indus. The Guru travelled along the river until he reached Thatta, a town of great antiquity, fifty miles east of Karachi. From here he turned north-west across the Habb river into Las Bela territory in the south-east of Baluchistan. He travelled further west to the famous shrine of Hinglaj, in a narrow gorge between mountain ranges, near the river Hingol. The shrine is dedicated to Hinglaj Devi, or the Red Goddess, who is known as Bibi Nani to Muslims and as Parvati, Kali or Mata to the Hindus. According to *Meharban Janam-*

²*Puratan*, p. 114.

sakhi, the Guru here had a discourse with the Vaishnavites who were at a loss to make out his faith or caste from his dress.³ A spot marked as Nanak's Dharamsala commemorates the Guru's visit.

Descending from the Hinglaj hill to the south, the Guru met a party of pilgrims on their way to Mecca. He joined this company and set sail with them, across the Arabian Sea, from the southern coast of Baluchistan. Thus does Bhai Gurdas describe his apparel on this occasion, "The Master had taken a blue attire. He carried a pilgrim's staff in his hand and a book under his arm, along with the ablution-pot and a prayermat."⁴ So equipped with the accessories of a *haji*, or Muslim pilgrim to Mecca, he blended happily with the group on its pious journey.

The vessel anchored off Jeddah, in the Red Sea, on the western coast of Arabia. Upon disembarking, the Guru and Mardana took up quarters near Eve's Tomb outside the walled city. Mardana's heart must have leapt with joy to see the minarets of the city's many ancient mosques. The scene was for him the picture of Mecca itself. Yet more than forty miles of wilderness lay between the two cities. The pilgrims travelled in slow-gliding caravans, with bells tinkling from the necks of dromedaries trudging their way wearily along, the devotees reciting the sacred passages and the cameleers singing to their animals songs to make them go faster. In one such caravan Guru Nanak and Mardana proceeded to Mecca. The *Janamsakhi* narrates, without locale, as usual, the story of a *haji*'s march with the Guru. "As they went along the road," says the story, "the *haji* saw that a tiny cloud travelled with them over their heads protecting them from the rays of the scorching sun. He claimed that the cloud was over his head. Then he spoke to the Guru, 'No

³Pp. 461-62.

⁴Var I, 32.

Hindu has ever gone to Mecca. Do not thou go with me. Either walk ahead or behind.' The Guru replied, 'Well, even so let it be. Go thou ahead!' So the *haji* stepped forward. When he looked back, there was no Guru, nor the cloud. Then the *haji* began to wring his hands in grief and said to himself, 'I had seen God Himself, but, alas, I was not equal to my good fortune. I was misled.'"⁵

The Guru and Mardana crossing the rocky range entered the narrow valley where Mecca lies. The *Puratan Janamsakhi* continues the story: "It had been inscribed in books beforehand that Nanak, a dervish, would come. Then water would rise in the wells of Mecca. The Guru entered the holy precincts. He lay down [in the colonnade] to rest. Then he fell asleep. His feet were stretched towards the Ka'aba. It was the time for evening prayer. Qazi Rukn-ud-Din⁶ came to say his *namaz*. When he beheld him lying in this posture, he spoke out, 'O thou, man of God, see! Thou stretchest thy feet towards the house of God, the Ka'aba? Dost thou not see?' The Guru answered, 'Where the house of God is not, turn my feet to that direction.' Then Qazi Rukn-ud-Din dragged his feet round. In whatever direction he turned his feet, to that direction the Ka'aba was also turning. Qazi Rukn-ud-Din became astonished and kissed his feet. . . . He said, 'Marvellous, marvellous! Today I have seen a true faqir of God.'"⁷

⁵*Puratan*, pp. 114-15.

⁶Some later writers tend to identify him with Shaikh Rukn-ud-Din, grandson of Shaikh Baha-ud-Din Zikaria of Multan, which would be anachronistic. Shaikh Rukn-ud-Din was a contemporary of Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din Awliya and lived in the earlier part of the fourteenth century. His disciple Shaikh Jalal, or Makhdum Jahanian Jahangasht of Uch, who was famous for the seven pilgrimages he made to Mecca, died in 1384. Rukn-ud-Din referred to in *Puratan* might have been one of Makhdum Jahanian's descendants or some other Sufi saint, possibly, from India.

⁷*Puratan*, pp. 115-19. Bhai Gurdas (*Var* I, 32) also has this *sakhi*. There the Guru is described as sleeping with his feet in the direction of the Ka'aba. In the morning,

Many learned divines and pilgrims gathered on the spot. "They opened their books," says Bhai Gurdas, "and began to question the Guru. They wished to know who was superior, the Hindu or the Musalman. The Guru answered that without good deeds both would come to grief. In God's court no one was accepted as Hindu or Musalman. Ephemeral like the safflower dye which ran when washed in water were these marks. Hindus and Muslims slandered each other and Ram, as God was called by the former, or Rahim, as He was named by the latter, was remembered by neither. The world in fact followed the devil's path."⁸

According to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, the Guru here uttered this hymn in Persian vocabulary :

One supplication I make before Thee;
 I beg Thee to listen, Holy Lord!
 Thou art true, Thou art great,
 Thou art munificent and Thou art without blemish.
 Thou art the sustainer!
 Impermanent is this worldly abode;
 this is the truth one should know in one's heart.
 Thy forelocks are in the hands of Izrail,⁹
 and yet thou knowest it not.
 Wife, son, father, brothers—
 there will be none then to hold thy hand.
 None will save when the end comes.
 Cupidity ruled one's life; sin one's thoughts;
 and never was a good deed done.
 This was man's condition—
 of ill-fortune, maliciousness, negligence, shamelessness.
 I am, saith Nanak, Thy slave—
 the dust off the feet of Thy slaves!¹⁰

one Jiwan—this is more like an Indian name—comes and seeing him lying thus strikes him angrily with his foot. He beholds the Ka'aba turning as he pulls him around by his legs.

⁸Var I, 33.

⁹The angel of death, in the Muslim belief, who takes away the soul from the human body.

¹⁰Guru Granth, *Tilang*, p. 721.

From Mecca, Guru Nanak and Mardana struck northwards and arrived in Medina, the city of the Prophet. They travelled further north-east, across the Arabian desert, to Baghdad,¹¹ on the banks of the Tigris. The Guru sat near a tomb outside the town and began to sing hymns in praise of the Almighty, with Mardana playing to him the rebeck. This was his daily practice. Music being forbidden in orthodox Muslim devotion, this was considered an act of sacrilege. Complaints against the alien faqir accumulated. One day the citizens arrived to mete out to him the penalty. "There came boys, old men and young men. The Guru greeted them with a divine invocation uttered in the style of the Muslims' call to prayer. Hearing this the entire crowd was stilled . . . Their arms lifted to pelt stones were immobi-

¹¹Later accounts mention that Guru Nanak travelled further north from Mecca, visited Syria and went on to Turkey on the European continent. Some also include Egypt, Ethiopia and other African countries in his western itinerary. But these accounts receive no support from earlier sources such as Bhai Gurdas and *Puratan Janamsakhi*. On Baghdad, however, Bhai Gurdas' testimony is categorical and has generally remained unchallenged. It was in fact corroborated by the discovery in the tomb of Bahlul Danah, to the south-west of modern Baghdad, of a Turkish inscription referring to Guru Nanak. The discovery was made by some Sikh soldiers in 1917 during World War I and made public by Sub-Major Fateh Singh through a printed letter he issued from Baghdad on May 9, 1918. The inscription has since been reproduced in works such as Sewaram Singh's *The Divine Master*, Bhai Vir Singh's *Guru Nanak Chamatkar* and Santokh Singh's *Nanak Prakash. A Short History of the Sikhs*, by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, has reproduced the words of the inscription in Arabic characters. These and other authors have also supplied translations and, although their versions mutually differ, the reference in each case has been established to be to Guru Nanak. But this has now been impugned by W. H. McLeod in his work *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. He had the inscription read, from a photograph, by a Turkish scholar in London, who said that the words which clearly appeared to be and had always been deciphered as "Baba Nanak" were a misreading. His reason was that the words did not fit the metre. He does not provide an alternative reading. Another scholar, Dr Jhinasi Tekin, Lecturer on Turkish, Harvard University, to whom a photograph of the inscription was referred, along with dissentient comment, has read the words as "Baba Nanak." In his reading, the words "Baba Nanak" fall in with the metrical measure. Also see Appendix I.

lized in the air.”¹² According to Bhai Gurdas, Pir Dastgir¹³ turned up and asked the Guru who he was and to which dynasty of faqirs he belonged. Mardana replied, “Nanak has appeared in this Kali age. Rejecting all faqirs, he recognizes but one Supreme Being. He is known in the heavens and in the world and he is known in all four directions.”¹⁴

The memory survives in Baghdad of the Guru’s meeting with another faqir whose name has been mentioned as Bahlul.¹⁵ The legend has found modern expression in a poem, in English, by a wandering Hindu monk. After visiting the hallowed spot, he wrote :

Upon this simple slab of granite didst
thou sit, discoursing of fraternal
love and holy light, O Guru Nanak,
Prince among India’s holy sons!
What song from the source of the
Seven waters thou didst sing to
charm the soul of Iran!
What peace from Himalaya’s lonely
caves and forests thou didst carry
to the vine-groves and rose-gardens
of Baghdad!
What light from Badarinath’s snowy
peak thou didst bear to illumine
the heart of Balol, thy saintly
Persian disciple!
Eight fortnights Balol hearkened to
thy words on life and the Path

¹²Santokh Singh, *Nanak Prakash*, Vol. III, pp. 1046-47.

¹³He might have been the contemporary successor of Abdul Qadir Gilani, also called Pir-i-Dastgir, who was a famous Muslim saint. He lived in the twelfth century. His tomb in Baghdad is held in special veneration.

¹⁴Bhai Gurdas, *Var I*, 35.

¹⁵He may have been a successor, or the head of the tomb, of Bahlul Danah who has been described as a boon companion and relative of Khalifa Harun-ar-Rashid (G. Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 350).

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and Spring Eternal, while the moon
waxed and waned in the pomegranate grove
beside the grassy desert of the dead.
And after thou hadst left him to return to
thy beloved Bharta's land, the
faqir, it is said, would speak to
none nor listen to the voice of
man or angel.
His fame spread far and wide and the
Shah came to pay him homage—
but the holy man would take no
earthly treasures nor hear the praise
of kings and courtiers.
Thus lived he—lonely, devoted, thoughtful—
for sixty winters, sitting before the
stone whereon thy sacred feet
had rested . . . ¹⁶

Baghdad was the turning-point in Guru Nanak's travel to the west country. From here he took the road north-east to Kermanshah, the only natural passage into Iran from the west. Along this track, used since ancient times by merchants, soldiers, adventurers and pilgrims from Iran to the shrines in Karbala, Najaf and Kazimain, the Guru and Mardana traversed vast desert emptiness, rivulets and sandstone rocks and hills. Time has covered up the traces of this and further journey across Iran, some Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. Old chronicles have left no records. Following a later demarcation,¹⁷ obviously built on the vaguest of hints and divesting it of its geographical

¹⁶Sri Ananda Acharya, "On Reading an Arabic Inscription in a Shrine outside the town of Baghdad, dated 912 Hejira," in *Snow-birds*, London: Macmillan, 1919. There is no precise information available of this "Arabic inscription." Maybe, the poet had seen the inscription already referred to. That inscription is in Turkish, but apparently his interest was more in the story he had heard than in deciphering the inscription.

¹⁷Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, pp. 440-66.

impasse, it appears the Guru travelled through Tehran, Bukhara, Kagan, Katta-Kurgan, Samarkand, Balkh (Wazirabad), Kabul and Jalalabad¹⁸ over to Peshawar, via the Khyber Pass. The *Meharban Janamsakhi*, which says that in the course of his western odyssey he visited Syria and Kabul, in addition to Mecca, and which mentions no other places or countries, refers to his arrival in Peshawar on the backward journey.¹⁹ Here at Gorakhatri, or Gorakhsetra, the temple of Gorakhnath, the Guru had a discourse with the leader of the yogis of his sect, the Kanphatas.

Crossing the Indus, Guru Nanak and Mardana came to Hasan Abdal, 10 miles north-west of Taxila, in Rawalpindi district. On the peak of the hill here lived a Muslim saint known as Baba Wali of Kandahar. Feeling fatigued and thirsty but seeing no water in the vicinity, Mardana went up the hill to Baba Wali. The latter desired to know who he was and how he happened to wander in that direction. When he heard Mardana tell him that he was in the company of no ordinary being, he refused to give him water and said that, if his master was so accomplished, he should not let his follower go thirsty. Mardana walked back and told the Guru what Baba Wali had said. The Guru told Mardana to go again and supplicate the Wali with humility. Mardana obeyed, but returned only to report the failure of his mission. The Guru then asked him to lift a small stone from the hillside. As he did this, water spouted forth. Mardana drank his fill. But with this new spring discovered, Baba Wali's reservoir on the hill began to ebb and soon dried up. This made him violently angry and, as says the story, he rolled a huge boulder downhill towards the travellers. The Guru calmly raised his hand with open palm. The rocky

¹⁸There is a Gurdwara called Sultanpur near Jalalabad commemorating the Guru's visit. There was a similar shrine in Kabul also, but it fell into disrepair.

¹⁹P. 463.

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mass, it is said, stopped in its downward course and his palm made an impress upon it.²⁰ Baba Wali came and fell down at the Guru's feet. The stone with the palm-mark, or *panja*, recessed into it is still preserved on the site. From it the spring of water miraculously released is known as Panja Sahib. So was the town of Hasan Abdal popularly renamed. The Gurdwara built there is one of Sikhs' most magnificent and widely venerated shrines.

The Guru now proceeded further into the Punjab by the south-easterly thoroughfare. Near Jhelum he visited two ancient shrines—Tilla Balnath and Katas. At the former, also known as Tilla Balgundai, the Guru is said to have converted the chief of the yogi monastery. From Katas he travelled on to Saidpur to see his old disciple Lalo. Babar, the conqueror from across the western mountains and founder of the Mughal dynasty of India, was then out on his third excursion into the country. After seizing Sialkot he descended upon Saidpur. Sialkot had submitted without resistance and was preserved from plunder, but Saidpur was not so fortunate. It attempted defence and suffered the worst fury of the invading host. The town was taken by assault, the garrison put to the sword and the inhabitants carried into captivity.²¹ Another reason of the severity of Babar's soldiers was that Saidpur marked the end of this expedition. While here, the invader received news from Kabul, his capital city, of an attack upon his own territories which caused him to turn back precipitantly and frustrated his plans for further conquests.

Guru Nanak was witness to events which overtook

²⁰This story figures only in the later editions of *Bala Janamsakhi*. A version of it which he had heard at the time of a visit to the spot is recorded by William Moorcroft who travelled in these parts in 1824 (*Travels*, II, pp. 319-20).

²¹According to Firishtah (*Twarikh-i-Firishtah*, II, p. 202), 30,000 slaves, men and women, were collected in the camp.

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Saidpur. He felt the pain of these in his heart. Poetry of intense feeling and power broke forth from him. The sufferings of the people, Hindus and Muslims alike, were articulated in words of touching compassion, potent with the energy of protest. The hymns uttered are preserved in the Guru Granth. Thus did Guru Nanak express himself in one of these :

Lord, Thou tookest Khurasan²² under Thy wing,
but yieldest India to the invaders' wrath.
Yet Thou takest no blame;
And sendest the Mughal as the messenger of death.
When there was such suffering, killing, such shrieking in pain,
Didst not Thou, O God, feel pity?
Creator, Thou art the same for all!
If one tyrant attacketh another,
it troubleth not the heart.
But when a lion falleth upon a herd of cattle,
the master will be questioned for not protecting it.
The miserable Lodhis, the rulers of India, have lost
their priceless jewel,
No one will remember them after they are gone.
But mysterious are Thy ways,
Thou alone makest and Thou alone severest!²³

And again :

Leading the wedding-array of sin,
Babar hath descended from Kabul and demandeth
by force the bride, O Lalo.
Decency and righteousness have vanished,
and falsehood stalketh abroad, O Lalo.
Gone are the days of Qazis and Brahmans,
Satan himself reads the marriage services, O Lalo.

²²Country between the Hindu Kush and Amu Darya which Babar, in spite of his repeated attempts, failed to conquer from Kabul where he had established his kingdom.

²³Guru Granth, *Asa*, p. 360.

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The Muslim women recite the Qur'an,
and in distress remember their God, O Lalo.
Similar is the fate of Hindu women
of castes high and low, O Lalo.
They sing paeans of blood, O Nanak,
and by blood, not saffron, anointment is made.
In this city of corpses, Nanak proclaimeth God's praises,
and uttereth this true saying :
The Lord who created men and put them to their tasks
watcheth them from His seclusion.
True is that Lord, true His verdict and true the justice
He dealeth.²⁴

According to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, Guru Nanak and Mardana were also captured at Saidpur. They fell into the hands of Mir Khan the Mughal who ordered them to be taken to prison as slaves. The Guru was given a load to carry and Mardana a horse to lead. But Mir Khan, says the *Janamsakhi*, saw that the Guru's bundle was carried without support and Mardana's horse followed him without the reins. He reported this to Sultan Babar and said, "Sovereign, a faqir has been taken into custody whose loads carry themselves a cubit above his head. His servant walks playing the rebeck and worshipping God, with the horse following behind him." The Sultan remarked, "If there were such faqirs here, the town should not have been struck."

In camp outside the town women were collected and made to grind corn. "The Pathan women," says the *Janamsakhi*, "and Kashatriya women and Brahman women were seated together doing their forced chores. The Guru too was given a handmill, but his mill turned by itself. Then the king came there. The Guru burst forth into this song :

They whose hair made them look fairer by far
and who touched it lovingly with sacred vermilion,

²⁴Guru Granth, *Tilang*, p. 722.

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Have had their heads shorn with the scissors,
and their throats choked with dust.
They who stirred not out of their private chambers
are now denied shelter even on the roadside.
Praise, praise be unto Thee, O Lord!
We understand not Thy ways;
everything is in Thy power
and Thou seest Thyself in diverse forms at Thy will.

When they were married,
they looked so beautiful beside their bridegrooms,
They came seated in palanquins
with ivory-bangles asport on their arms.
They were awaited with pitchers full of water,
and with fans arabesqued in glass.
Gifts of money were showered on them as they sat,
and gifts of money showered as they stood.
They were given coconut and dates to eat,
and they joyed on the bridal bed.
Halters now fasten their necks,
and broken are their strings of pearls.²⁵

“Then,” says the *Janamsakhi*, “Babar kissed his feet. He said, ‘On the face of this faqir one sees God Himself.’ Then all the people, Hindus and Musalmans, began to make their salutations. The king spoke again, ‘O dervish, accept something.’ The Guru answered, ‘I take nothing, but release all the prisoners of Saidpur and restore their property to them.’ King Babar ordered, ‘Those who are in detention be released and their property be returned to them.’ All the prisoners of Saidpur were set at liberty.”²⁶

Saidpur was attacked by Babar during his third invasion of India which took place towards the close of A.D. 1520. This helps to fix one important date in the life of the Guru—

²⁵Guru Granth, *Asa*, p. 417.

²⁶*Puratan*, p. 73.

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i.e., by the beginning of 1521 he had finished his major *udasis*.

Thus did the Guru describe the desolation which followed in the wake of Babar's invasion :

Where is that sport now, where those stables and steeds;
and where are the drums and where the flutes?

Where are the sword-belts and where the chariots;
and where are those scarlet uniforms?

Where are those finger-rings studded with mirrors;
and where are those handsome faces?

This world is Thine and Thou art its Master,
O Lord!

In one moment Thou settleth and in another unsettleth.
The lure of gold sunders brother from brother.

Where are those houses, those mansions and palaces;
and where are those elegant-looking *serais*?

Where are those snug couches and where those beautiful brides
a sight of whom made one sleepless?

Where is the chewing-leaf, where the leaf-sellers
and where those who patronized them?

All have vanished like a shadow.

For this gold many were led astray;
many suffered ignominy for it.

Without sinning thou dost not gather it,
and it doth not go with thee in the end.

Whomsoever the Creator would confound He first forfeiteth
his virtue.

Countless *pirs* tried their miraculous powers
to halt the Mir (Babar) as they heard of his approach.

He burned ancient seats and houses strongly built
and cast into dust princes after severing their heads.

Yet no Mughal became blind and no magic of the *pirs* worked.
The Mughals and the Pathans were locked in battle,
and they wielded their swords relentlessly.

They fired their guns; they attacked with their elephants.
They whose writ is torn in the Lord's court
must perish, my brethren.

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Of the wives of Hindus, of Turks,
 of Bhattis and of Thakur Rajputs—
Some had their veils torn from head to foot,
 others lay heaped up in cemeteries,
How did they pass their nights
 whose husbands returned not home?²⁷

²⁷Guru Granth, *Asa*, pp. 417-18.

CHAPTER XIV

KARTARPUR

THUS reflecting upon the Saidpur episode and the abjectness of the people and uttering words of great poetic delicacy, challenge and prophecy, Guru Nanak resumed his journey. Kartarpur, sixty miles to the east, was reached in a few days. This time the Guru had returned to the village to make it his home. "The Baba," says Bhai Gurdas, "came to Kartarpur and laid aside the pilgrim's apparel. He clad himself in workaday clothes and continued the ministry sitting on a cot . . . He uttered the inspired word, ushering in the light and dispelling darkness. Learned discourses and the recitation of divine praises were the order of the day. In the evening were sung the Guru's compositions, *Sodar* and *Arati*, and in the morning the *Japuji*."¹

In this pattern, briefly sketched by Bhai Gurdas, is epitomized the process by which everyday life was gaining in moral and social worth. Never taking to any particular garb and in fact varying always the elements in his costume, the Guru now finally adopted the home dress. Implied in this act was the rejection of the merely formal and ritualistic as well as the assertion that true religious discipline ripened only in a life lived in the world—the note on which the Guru had begun his teaching. The fraternity coming into being at Kartarpur was marked by faith, charity, equality, affirmation, trust, mutual help and service. It was no monastic order, but a fellowship of ordinary men engaged

¹Var I, 38.

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in ordinary occupations who believed in the Guru and made his word the support of their lives. They came to Kartarpur and then returned to their homes filled with ardour and hope and devoted to the practice which they had witnessed and shared. Devotion was laicized and the rewards of the religious way were shown to be accessible equally to all. Kartarpur signified a complete rule of life based not on any elaborate code of conduct, but on a living moral ideal informed by deep faith in God and Guru. Thus was exemplified in practice what the Guru had taught through the years.

The number of people arriving to see the Guru increased daily and, as says the *Janamsakhi*, "there came Gianis or men of letters, meditators, hermits, cenobites, mendicants, destitutes, noblemen, shaven-heads, Vaishnavites, celibates, yogis, Digambers, sannyasis, ascetics, milk-sippers (who ate nothing else), Bhaktas, minstrels, the detached ones, maskers, Siddhas, sadhus, faqirs, dervishes, Muslim mystics, Muslim divines, inquirers, arguers, Pirs, teachers, Hindus, Musalmans, householders, rajas, the needy, penitents, Kashatriyas, Brahmans, Vaishas, Shudras, Pandits, poets, songsters and men accomplished in diverse ways. Whoever there was came. Whatever wish he brought was fulfilled. Whatever one desired one obtained.

"Then on earth and on water Nanak's name became current. When such was the Guru's glory, Mardana the minstrel, who had been his associate since early days, was still with him."²

Mardana played the rebeck for the Master as he had always done—at home and abroad, in crowds and in lonely jungles, in hamlets and in cities, in the heat of bare, sandy plains, and in the cool of wooded springs by hillside. To Mardana's rebeck had been sung snatches of sublimest

²*Meharban*, II, p. 145.

poetry and hymns divinely inspired. The Guru continued to recite the sacred verse and to Kartarpur are traced some of his major compositions. Here was also firmly established the custom of singing in chorus the holy chants as part of morning and evening services. Mardana and his son Shahzada provided the music, and whoever was present joined. This *kirtan*, or congregational recitation, was designed not to bring on any mood of ecstatic intoxication but to draw the assembly into gentle and collective contemplation on God's name. Participation in religious and other activity on equal, community terms was a vital feature of the style of life evolving at Kartarpur.

An institution of far-reaching import was the *langar*, or community meal, which symbolized brotherhood, equality and humbleness. Everyone who could engaged himself in one task or another—drawing water from the well, grinding corn, collecting fuelwood, cooking food, distributing it, waving the fan over the assembly in refectory to alleviate the rigour of a hot summer's day, cleaning the dishes, and so on. This common food was eaten by all, inmates and visitors alike, sitting in rows together signifying surrender of caste scruples and affirming their new sense of community. *Sewa*, or voluntary physical labour in the service of the community, was regarded as the rarest privilege and was sought avidly in its different forms. The most menial task was the most prized. Thus a fraternity with an intensely religious and social outlook grew out of the truths Guru Nanak had preached his life long.

The Guru had made numerous disciples during his vast travels and *sangats* had been set up at several places. Kartarpur was now the centre to which the adherents repaired to seek his blessing and reaffirm their duty. All visitors were expected to take part in the congregational prayers and eat in the *langar* in company with the others. The Guru himself

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joined the assembly in the *dharamsala* after his morning's devotions. Two of the Guru's compositions, *Japuji* and *Asa di Var*, were recited and the singing of hymns in chorus and prayers lasted until a watch and a quarter after day-break. In the evening, *Sodar* was said and some hymns sung after which everyone went to the *langar* for dinner. Before retiring a short prayer called *Sohila* was read. The day was spent in listening to the Guru's instruction and in a variety of community activity. The Guru uttered the word "as it was sent to him," expounded it, had an occasional discourse with a visiting divine or recluse and participated in devout recitation morning and evening. Alongside of his responsibility as spiritual guide, he tilled his farm to provide for himself and his family. His precept and example became firmly embedded in the society that was being reared in Kartarpur.

In 1522, both of Guru's parents died.³ Father Kalu was then eighty-two years old. The focus of his life during most of these four score years had been his son and it must have been a source of great contentment to him to end his days peacefully in his presence. According to *Bhai Mani Singh Janamsakhi*, Mother Tripta died a few days after Baba Kalu.

Many felt attracted by the atmosphere of piety, corporate endeavour and moral aspiration at Kartarpur and became disciples. Bhai Gurdas inscribes in one of his odes the names of a few of Guru Nanak's prominent Sikhs such as Bhai Buddha, Mardana the minstrel, Taru Popat, Moola Keer, Pirtha Soeni, Pirthimal Sehgal, Rama Didi, Daulat Khan Lodhi, Bhagta Ohri, Sihan Uppal, Bhagirath of Malsian, Ajita Randhawa, Firna Khehra, Malo, Manga, Gujjar the blacksmith, and Dhing the barber. Taru Popat, says Bhai Gurdas, was of a religious disposition from the very outset. He was scarcely ten years old when he presented himself before the Guru and made this submission, "Friend of the

³Kahan Singh, *Mahan Kosh* (pp. 243 and 455).

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poor, I have heard that whosoever meets a saint obtains peace. I have taken refuge at thy feet!" The Guru answered, "You are yet too young and have hardly seen anything of this life. Wherefrom have you learned to think of these things?" Popat spoke, "One day I watched my mother make a fire. I saw that the smaller logs caught fire sooner than the bigger ones. It occurred to me that I should see a saint as soon as possible so that I secure happiness. Who knows when death might strike?" The Guru pronounced the words, "Taru (literally, "swimmer"), thou shalt be the salvager of thy clan. Learn to make an honest living and learn to share the fruit of thy labour with others. Remember thy Creator always."⁴

A *sakhi* tells of Moola Keer who sang the word with love and lived by honest labour. He served the Guru's Sikhs with all his heart and by all his means. His doors were always open and Sikhs came by day and Sikhs came by night. He who needed food was given food and he who needed bed was given bed. Once there came to his house a man who had learned much of the sacred word by heart but whose deeds were not in conformity with what he professed. Moola treated him hospitably as he treated everyone who came to his house. Before retiring his wife put away in a cupboard the gold ornaments she was wearing. Then she and her husband went to sleep, but not their guest. He arose from his bed and removed the ornaments from where Moola's wife had kept them. Much before dawn he awoke his host to ask for the key of the gate to go out. As Moola opened the door for him, the sachet containing the ornaments fell from under his arm. He immediately picked it up and put it into the hands of his guest

⁴*Sikhan di Bhagatmala*, Khalsa Samachar, pp. 31-32. This book which is an annotation, with *sakhis* added, of Bhai Gurdas' *Var* XI, containing names of some of Guru Nanak's followers, is attributed to Bhai Mani Singh.

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and bade him goodbye. When his wife discovered the loss, Moola told her that their house had been broken into by thieves at night and her ornaments stolen. He explained the guest's absence by saying that he left early in the morning lest anyone should blame him. Then he had new ornaments made for his wife. Moola did not wish it to be known that anyone calling himself a Sikh had done such an act. The Guru was pleased with him and said, "Thou hast shown esteem for the honour of the faith. The Guru shall save thy honour."⁵

Sihan and Gajjan, the Uppals, were two cousins who became the Guru's Sikhs. A *sakhi* is related of the marriage of Sihan's daughter. A day before the bridegroom was to arrive with the wedding-party there came to his house a large contingent of Sikhs on their way to Kartarpur to see the Guru. Both cousins stinted nothing in their entertainment. Whatever had been prepared for the wedding guests was consumed. Then Sihan's wife began to worry and said to her husband, "What shall we give our guests to eat tomorrow?" "Don't be anxious," said Sihan. "The Guru will save our honour." Next day when the bridegroom's party arrived, Sihan made his prayer and opened the lock of the store. All the guests from the bridegroom's side as well as the bride's side were entertained and yet neither sweets nor victuals ran short. They kept the wedding party for five days and no one complained of lack of attention or hospitality. Sihan and Gajjan were overcome with

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 33-34. This quality was so conspicuously noticeable that historian Sujana Rai Bhandari, writing in the seventeenth century, said, "They [the followers of Guru Nanak] consider rendering service in the name of the Guru to their own people and to others as the highest form of worship. If a stranger or even a thief or a robber were to call at their door at midnight and seek shelter in the name of their Guru, they would serve him as a friend and brother to the best of their capacity. See *Khulasat-ut-Twarikh*. (Urdu), p. 112.

gratefulness and said within themselves, "The Guru himself saves the honour of his Sikhs."⁶

Firna Khehra and Jodh found refuge at the Guru's feet and became his disciples. Then they asked him for instruction and prayed that they be endowed with faith. The Guru pronounced these words, "Ye should learn humility to achieve truth. Serve with thy hands brother-Sikhs as best ye can. Be early risers, wash and sit in remembrance of God. Know God as thy master and thyself as His menservants. Join holy assembly and with love listen to the Guru's word. Ye should practise in thy lives the word ye hear."

Thus did Firna Khehra and Jodh achieve what they had desired.⁷

A Sikh who earned high praise and honour was Bhai Buddha. His original name was Bura and he came of a family of Randhawa *jats* of Amritsar district. He was no more than twelve when he met the Guru and became attached to him. Like other youths of his age in the village, he grazed cattle during the day. As he was once out in the jungle with his herd of cows, the Guru happened to come in his direction. Bura brought a bowl of freshly drawn milk and placed it before him. Then he prayed to him in this manner, "Pious Sir, I have been today favoured that I had a sight of you. Absolve me now from this circuit of life and death." The Guru said, "You are only a child yet. Who taught you this wisdom?" "Once the Mughal soldiers set up camp by our village," spoke Bura, "and we saw that they mowed down ripe crops as well as unripe ones. Then it occurred to me that when no one could check those soldiers who would hold the hand of the god of death."

⁶*Ibid.* pp. 51-52.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 62.

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The Guru pronounced the words, "You speak like an old man. You are not a child."⁸

From that day Bura came to be known as Buddha (literally, old man), with the affectionate title of Bhai, or brother, added to his name. He visited Kartarpur frequently and then went to reside there. He was known for his piety and wisdom and came to be the most trusted member of the fraternity. He lived up to the age of 125⁹ and carried, through the times of the five succeeding Gurus, the aura of those early days of the faith and his personal influence as one of the First Guru's own devoted Sikhs.

Most auspicious was the coming of Lehna, a resident of village Khadur, some sixty miles away. He was born in Sarai Naga, near Muktsar, made famous later by the Tenth Guru and his forty followers who laid down their lives for him. From Sarai Naga, Lehna went to live in Khadur. He was a worshipper of the goddess Durga and led every year a batch of devotees from Khadur to her temple at Jawalamukhi, in the lower Himalayas. There lived in that village a Sikh, named Jodha, who uttered from his lips always the word "Guru." The rest of Khadur adored Durga and they made fun of the Sikh's piety.¹⁰ One day Lehna heard him recite the Guru's hymns and felt deeply moved. On his way to Jawalamukhi, Lehna paused at Kartarpur. Here ended his quest and all his journeyings. He found in the Guru's presence the solace and joy he had been seeking. He tore away from his wrists and ankles the jingle-bells that he wore to dance before the goddess. His companions pressed him to continue his journey with them and said that

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁹According to Kahan Singh (*Mahan Kosh*, p. 660), he was born in 1506 and died in 1631.

¹⁰*Puratan*, p. 123.

“it was written in the holy books of their faith that he who threw any obstacle in the way of those who were doing penance, giving alms, fasting, going on pilgrimage, or getting married; who through laziness or fear of growing weary failed to worship Durga, the giver of wealth and holiness; or who having made a vow relinquished all efforts to accomplish it, was a great sinner, and his wealth and sons shall all perish.” Lehna told them that he would travel no more.

“What is thy name?” asked the Guru when he returned to him. “Lehna,” he answered. “Thy debt was here. So God hath brought thee hither,” spoke the Guru.¹¹ “Lehna,” in Punjabi, means to receive, to take or the debt owed to a creditor. And from the Guru Lehna received what was destined for him alone.

With his whole heart Lehna, then twenty-eight, gave himself to the Guru’s word and to deeds of service in the *sangat* and, as says the *Janamsakhi*, he cleaned the utensils and swung the fan.¹² Obedience and humility marked his conduct and he remained constant to the modest duty he had set himself from the first day. As his heart was purified by pious labour, so was his understanding illumined. He had so truly grasped the Guru’s teaching and the spirit which surrounded Kartarpur that he came to be regarded among the chosen disciples. Yet he preferred always to stand in the ranks performing his many humble tasks. “Living in the presence of the Guru, he attained tranquillity. Thus did he reach his goal. The Guru showered his favours upon him. As Guru Baba Nanak was, even so Lehna became. As was the Guru so was the disciple.”¹³

¹¹ *Meharban*, II, p. 67.

¹² *Puratan*, p. 124.

¹³ *Meharban*, II, p. 67.

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“Having been so fulfilled,” continues the *sakhi*, “Lehna took leave of the Guru. After three years’ stay at Kartarpur, he returned home to Matte-ki-sarai.¹⁴ The villagers well knew that Lehna the Trehan had not gone to the goddess with the pilgrims but stayed behind with Guru Nanak . . . Now when he came back after three years the whole village said that their Lehna who dwelt with Nanak had arrived surrounded with a halo. All turned out to meet him. He stood up as he saw them. Everyone hugged him in greeting except Takhat Mal, the headman, who touched his feet. Lehna stopped him saying, ‘Brother Takhat Mal, let us meet by embracing each other.’ Takhat Mal answered, ‘You have come from the place of the holy one. You yourself are elevated. We profit by touching your feet.’”¹⁵

Lehna made the trip back to Kartarpur. Upon arrival there, he went to meet the Guru in the fields outside the village. He paid obeisance at the feet of the Guru. He was then wearing a suit of clothes finely sewed. At the end of the day’s work grass had to be carried into the village. Lehna took the bundles upon his head. As he walked, mud dripped from the wet grass soiling his clothes. The Guru’s wife felt sorry to see Lehna’s dress thus spoiled. She said to the Guru, “What is this custom of yours? One born of a good family is given such a sludgy load of grass to carry on his head.” The Guru spoke in kindness, “This is not a load of grass, but a wreath of sovereignty.”¹⁶

¹⁴Matte-ki-Sarai, or as it has also been called Matte-ki-Sarai Hariki by the chronicler, is the older name of Lehna’s native village which is now known as Sarai Naga. This story is an instance of the telescoping of chronology so common in the Janamsakhis. Here Lehna has been given the name of Guru Angad which came to him after his succession. Also, in *Puratan* he is mentioned as residing at Khadur before he visited Guru Nanak which indicates that he had by then migrated from his native Matte-ki-Sarai.

¹⁵*Meharban*, II, p. 67.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 68. In *Puratan*, the story has almost the same form. In *Mani Singh*

Many were Lehna's acts of pious abnegation and service and many were the Guru's favourable prophecies.

One winter night it rained heavily and in that rain one of the walls of the *dharamsala* collapsed. The Guru desired that the wall be repaired immediately. His sons said that they would send for masons and labourers in the morning and have the damaged side restored. But the Guru insisted that they put the work in hand at once. So they started repairing the wall. The Guru then told them that the portion they had built needed to be reconstructed and asked them to demolish it. They tore down what they had built. But when they were asked to start afresh they protested saying that they must have some sleep. The Guru thereupon asked Lehna who set to work immediately. "For days and nights on end," says the *Janamsakhi*, "he went on alternately raising the masonry and pulling it down at the Guru's command."¹⁷ Lakhmidas chided him with madness for thus continually repeating the procedure. Lehna replied that a servant's hands were only made pure by doing the Master's work.

At the age of sixty-one, Guru Nanak made yet another journey—a brief one this time—which took him south-east, across the Ravi, to Achal, an ancient temple dedicated to Shiva's son Kartik. The occasion was the Shivaratri fair which brought vast multitudes to the otherwise small village, in the vicinity of Batala, in Gurdaspur district, for

(p. 400), Lehna volunteered to carry the load after the Guru's sons, Srichand and Lakhmidas, had refused to do this menial work. Anticipating Lehna's eventual succession as Guru, the Janamsakhis have tended to present the sons, neither of whom was chosen for the spiritual office, as wilfully disregarding Guru Nanak's wishes. They have enumerated, to this end, a series of tests in which Lehna proved himself superior to everyone else in obedience and devotion. But his succession was ultimately a matter of spiritual insight and merit rather than of any formal admission of duty.

¹⁷ *Mani Singh*, p. 400.

six days of religious pilgrimage, festivity, music, vaudeville, acrobatic displays and carousal. Mendicants, ascetics and holy men came in large numbers. Predominant among them were the yogis and the Siddhas. Guru Nanak arrived accompanied by his disciples, and, as says the *Janamsakhi*, "among them was his principal minister Lehna."¹⁸

"As the Guru entered Achal," continues the *Janamsakhi*, "the name Nanak spread everywhere among the crowds. Everyone began to say that Nanak the renowned saint had come. Nanak whose *shabads* and hymns the world recited was himself there. Whoever was in Achal rushed to see him. Neither a yogi was left nor a sannyasi; neither a householder was left nor a recluse. Not a soul remained behind. Whosoever there was thronged to the spot saying, 'Nanak hath come, Nanak hath come.' The Guru sat on the bank of the pool between acacia and jujube trees. Countless people collected, everyone eager for a sight of him. Then a group of musicians came forward and began to recite in chorus before the Guru. Two of the yogis, Pavan Nath and Bhanger Nath, came and stood invisibly by. They stole the musicians' *lota* in which they collected money and hid it. Upon finding their bowl missing, the musicians forgot their stanzas and stopped singing. Whereupon Pavan Nath and Bhanger Nath spoke, 'See Nanakji! Their *lota* is gone and so the chorus has ceased.' 'What else could they do?' asked the Guru. 'They recite for their livelihood. You have hidden their vessel. What shall they do now?' 'Then you should recover it from where we have kept it and restore it to them,' said the yogis. The Guru asked one of his Sikhs to go and retrieve the *lota*. By the Guru's order the Sikh went and brought forth immediately the vessel hidden by the Siddhas. The Guru told the Sikh to return the bowl to the musicians. The musicians were overjoyed to have it. Then they com-

¹⁸ *Meharban*, II, p. 69.

pleted their recital. The Guru granted them their wishes.”¹⁹

Piqued by the crowds streaming in to see the Guru and by the discovery of the *lota* they had concealed, the yogis, says Bhai Gurdas, turned up in a body to engage him in debate. Bhangar Nath began by questioning him, “Why hast thou soured the milk by adding vinegar to it? Whoever obtained butter by churning sour milk? Why didst thou commit this sacrilege of rejecting thy religious vestment and taking again to worldly clothes?” “Bhangar Nath,” replied the Guru, “thou hast been perversely instructed. See what happened in thy case. The churning-vessel was not well cleansed and so the butter went rancid. Abandoning home-life, thou turnest an anchorite and yet thou goest to beg at the doors of householders. Thou wouldst have nothing to live by if they gave thee not.”

“On hearing these words the yogis set up a loud cry and raised a mighty tumult. They said that Nanak Bedi had defied in Kali age the ancient texts. Then they recited their mantras and tried all their esoteric powers. They assumed many different forms. Some became lions and leopards, others flew on wings like birds. Some turned themselves into serpents and hissed fretfully and some brought down rain of fire. Bhangar Nath plucked stars from the skies and some others began to float on water on deer-skin. Uncontrollable was the Siddhas’ envy.

“Then the Siddhas spoke, ‘Nanak, thou hast shown thy power to the world. Show thou some of it to us.’ ‘O Naths,’ said the Guru, ‘What the yogis do is of little value. I rely on nothing except the holy fellowship and the Word.’ The Guru sat becalmed, immobile in his divine posture. The Siddhas surrendered their magic arts. Their prowess was overcome by the Guru’s word. God is the giver of all things and nobody could comprehend him by his power of miracles.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

The yogis humbly sought refuge at the Guru's feet.

"Then the Guru said, 'Listen, O Naths, to the words I utter. Besides the True Name I possess no other miracle. Could I dress myself in clothes of fire and could I live in a temple of perpetual snow; could I make a meal of steel and could I have the entire world within my command; could I expand myself to the size of the earth and could I weigh the earth and the sky in the scales against a fraction of an ounce; and could I give release to whomsoever I wished—without the gift of Name all this would be like the shadow of a cloud.'"²⁰

"By the Guru's word contentment came to the Siddhas' hearts. Vanquishing the Shivaratri fair, the Guru gained tribute from adherents of all the six systems. The Siddhas then spoke auspiciously exclaiming, 'Exalted is thy rank, Nanak! A wonderful being has appeared who has kindled a new light in the Kali age.'"²¹

At Kartarpur, Mardana who was now in his seventy-sixth year²² fell ill. He grew weak and hope of recovery was lost. Born of a Muslim family, he had attached himself to Guru

²⁰This seems to be a paraphrase of Guru Nanak's own *shabad* in Guru Granth (*Var Majh*), p. 147.

²¹Bhai Gurdas, *Var I*, 41-44. The discourse which took place between him and the Siddhas is summed up in one of Guru Nanak's longer poems in the Guru Granth called *Siddha Gosh*. In it the dialogue is carried on in verse varying plain argument with philosophy. Ascetical yoga and theistic devotion mark the parallel thought-streams. Guru Nanak reiterated that union with the divine was achieved only through remembering His Name. The Name was manifested by the Eternal Guru. In this lay the secret of all yoga. According to the Guru, home-life was an essential condition of the highest fulfilment.

²²The dates (Kahan Singh, *Mahan Kosh*, p. 714) are: *b.* 1459 and *d.* 1534. According to this authority, Mardana died on the banks of the river Kurram, in Afghanistan, where Guru Nanak performed his last rites. In *Mani Singh* (p. 497) there is an indirect reference to Mardana's tomb being in "Khurma" country which may have suggested the place mentioned in *Mahan Kosh*. According to *Mani Singh* itself, Mardana died in Kartarpur. All available evidence, except *Mahan Kosh*, supports this view.

Nanak. The Guru asked him how he wished his body to be disposed of. Mardana replied that by the Guru's instruction he had overcome his pride of the body. What remained of him after death, he said, be disposed of as the Guru wished. Then the Guru said, "Shall I make thee a tomb to render thee famous in the world?" "When the Guru is releasing me from the bodily sepulchre, why should he entomb me in stone?" answered Mardana. The Guru asked him to fix his mind on the Creator. The following morning, at a watch before day, Mardana passed away. The Guru consigned his body to the river Ravi, and caused hymns sung and *karah prashad*, the sacrament, distributed among the Sikhs. He consoled Mardana's son, Shahzada, and other members of his family and asked them not to weep for him who had returned to his heavenly home.²³

Thus ended the fortunate career of the minstrel who had roamed the four corners of the world in the shadow of the Guru. Forty-seven years out of his allotted span of seventy-five he spent in his company, a privilege the gods in the heaven would have envied him. He faithfully followed him wherever he went, in fair weather and foul, suffered the hardship of long and continual travels through unknown countries and maintained his sense of humour, not unmixed with a certain professional playfulness, in face of frequent trials. He enjoyed during those long years the Guru's constant affection and confidence and shared his moods of transcendent revelation and utterance. The Guru had valued his company from the very outset and, as says the *Janamsakhi*, "the association of none other in Talwandi whether of the family or a neighbour pleased him more than Mardana's."²⁴ Kartarpur must have appeared somewhat

²³This account of Mardana's death is based on the version given in *Mani Singh*, pp. 496-97.

²⁴*Meharban*, p. 73.

different after the death of the Guru's loyal companion. His lean and aging, yet amiable, figure was such a familiar part of its outlook and his musical genius added such a characteristic note to the atmosphere. After Mardana, his son Shahzada took his place and accompanied the Guru for the remainder of his time.

The Guru was now himself advanced in years and for some time it had seemed as if he had made his choice of a successor to continue his mission. The *Puratan Janamsakhi* relates one final trial he carried out. "The order was made," tells the *Janamsakhi*, "and Gorakhnath²⁵ appeared. He said to the Guru, 'Widely spread is thy following.' The Guru spoke, 'Gorakhnath, thou shalt see how many belong to us.' Then he wandered out of the house and many people came and walked behind him. As the order was made, the ground became covered with copper coins. Many of the followers picked the coins and went away. Further on, the ground was covered with silver coins. Many took the silver coins and went away. Still further on, the ground was covered with gold mohurs. Whoever had remained took the gold mohurs and went away. Only two disciples were left with the Guru. As they went forward, they saw a funeral pyre, with four lamps burning. A dead body lay beside it covered over with a sheet and it gave an offensive smell. Then the Guru spoke, 'Is there anyone who would eat of it?' The second disciple that there was turned his face, spat and went away. But Lehna who remained took the order and stepping forward said, 'From which side shall I start, Master?' . . . Thereupon Gorakhnath said, 'Thy successor will be part and parcel of thy own being.' Guru Nanak addressed Lehna as *Angad* (i.e., part of himself.)"²⁶

²⁵This is anachronistic. Gorakh, the founder of the Nath sect of the yogis, lived much before Guru Nanak's time.

²⁶*Puratan*, p. 125.

"Then," says the *Janamsakhi*, "the Guru came to the bank of the Ravi. He placed five copper coins before Angad and bowed down at his feet."²⁷ Lehna the faithful disciple was thus installed Guru. He became Nanak himself. "Guru Nanak changed his own form and imparted his light to Lehna."²⁸ Guru Angad begged of the Guru to readmit to his favour his followers who had been tried and found wanting. "For thy sake they are pardoned," said the Guru. Upon this Guru Angad fell down at his feet. Guru Nanak asked him to return to his village Khadur and assume the teaching office.

The news spread that the Guru was ready to embark on his last journey. The disciples began to arrive in large numbers to see him. "Hindus and Musalmans all came . . . The Guru went and sat under an acacia tree. The withered tree burst into bloom. New leaves and flowers appeared. Guru Angad touched his feet in adoration."²⁹ Guru Nanak's wife was full of grief and wept. So did the other relations, family and disciples. The Guru pacified them and said that none should weep. He uttered this hymn :

Hail to the Creator the Eternal Sovereign,
 Who hath put each one in the world to his task !
 When the span is run out and the measure is full,
 the soul departeth the body.
 As the word arriveth and the soul leaveth,
 all family and friends weep.
 The body and soul become separated,
 when the days are at an end, O mother.
 By thy deeds as thou acquired,
 so hast thou received thy portion.
 Hail to the Creator, the Eternal Sovereign,
 Who hath put each one in the world to his task !

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁸Bhai Gurdas, *Var* I, 45.

²⁹*Puratan*, p. 128.

KARTAR PUR

Remember the Lord, brothers; this is the way all must go.
Transient are the attachments of this world;
 certain is the journey henceforward.
Certain is the journey henceforward like a guest's;
 then why abide in ego?
Repeat the name of Him alone
 by cherishing Whom thou shalt meet happiness in the end.
Ranks of this world will not be recognized in the next;
 none do know what will befall them there.
Remember the Lord, brothers; this is the way all must go.
What pleaseth the Omnipotent Lord shall happen,
 this creation is but His instrument.
The Creator Who is eternal pervadeth
 sea, land and space.
The Creator Who is eternal is unknowable and infinite,
 and none can comprehend his limit.
Fruitful indeed is the coming of those
 who give themselves single-mindedly to Him.
He destroyeth and He Himself createth,
 and by His order He adorneth.
That weeping is acceptable, O Nanak,
 which is in love for Him.
Vain is the weeping, unmindful the world
 which weepeth for earthly attachment.
In such weeping one torments the body without understanding.
Whoso cometh here must also go;
 vain is it to dwell in ego.
That weeping is acceptable, O Nanak,
 which is in love for Him.³⁰

Then the assembly of disciples began to sing the hymns. Holy music filled the air. The Guru went into a trance and, according to *Puratan Janamsakhi*, uttered in Tukhari measure the hymn which is preserved in the Guru Granth under the title Baramaha, or Twelve Months. This poem describes in lyric phrase the intense longing of the soul for union with the Transcendent in rhythm with the changing moods of

³⁰Guru Granth, *Wadhans*, p. 579.

nature. The symbolism is that of the bride's yearning for her husband. But this conventional figure is given a new richness and substance by the individuality and concreteness of the Guru's imagery. The Guru's mind turns to the trees, birds and flowers of his native Bar country and there is an unmistakable touch of nostalgia in the evocation of scenes embedded in his vision since his childhood. Of Chet, the first month of the Indian calendar, he sang :

The month of Chet is truly beautiful in the spring,
 and pleasant is the hum of the humble-bee.
 In the Bar the forests burst into bloom.
 I long for my beloved to return home.
 If husband returneth not home,
 how will the bride be comforted?
 Her body will be consumed in the ache of separation.
 The koel calleth sweetly from the mango-tree.
 How will my body endure the pain in this season of loveliness?
 The humble-bee freely hovereth around the flowering bough;
 how shall I live in separation, O mother?
 Happiness is attained in Chet, Nanak,
 if in her home the bride findeth the Spouse.³¹

As the *shabad* was finished, the Guru handed to Guru Angad the book in which were inscribed his hymns. The night was turning into dawn. Thus does the *Janamsakhi* describe the last moments of the Guru's life, "The Musalmans began to say, 'We shall bury him.' The Hindus said, 'We shall cremate him.' The Guru spoke, 'Put ye flowers on both sides—those of the Hindus on the right and those of the Musalmans on the left. They whose flowers remain fresh will have the choice.' Then he asked the *sangat* to recite God's praises. The *Sohila* was read :

Where the Lord's praise is sung
 and where men contemplate on Him,

³¹Guru Granth, *Tukhari*, p. 1108.

KARTARPUR

There shouldst thou go and sing the song of praise
and remember the Creator.
Sing thou praise of my fearless Lord.
How precious to me is the song
which bringeth everlasting comfort.
Day in, day out He looketh after His creation,
the Universal Giver careth for one and all.
None can appraise His gifts,
Then who can appraise the Giver Himself?
Fixed is the year and the day of the marriage.
Friends, pour oil upon the threshold to welcome the bride.
And pronounce blessing for me
that I may meet the Lord, too.
The writ goeth round every house,
and every day men are called forth.
May we remember Him who hath the authority to summon,
for the day, O Nanak, is not far.

“Then the epilogue to the *Japuji* was recited :

The air is the guru, water the father,
and the great earth the mother.
Day and night are the two nurses
in whose laps sports the entire world.
Our virtues and faults shall be judged
in front of the Lord.
By our deeds shall we be near to Him or afar.
Fruitful will be their toil
who have cherished the Name.
Unblemished will be their brows, O Nanak,
and many shall they lead to liberation with them.

“As the epilogue was recited, the Guru pulled the sheet over himself and lay down. The assembly paid obeisance. When the sheet was lifted, there was nothing but the flowers. The flowers of both the Hindus and the Musalmans remained fresh. The Hindus took theirs and Musalmans theirs. The whole *sangat* fell on their knees.”³²

³²*Puratan*, pp. 132-133.

On September 7, 1539,³³ Guru Nanak departed the body, leaving as his legacy a devoted community of disciples, a revelation open to high and low, to all castes and categories, and a successor-Guru to mould the course of future development.

The monuments the faithful had raised for the Guru were swept away by the encroaching Ravi. This, it is said, was in accord with his own wish. His descendants and followers then built a new town on the other side of the river, called it Dera Baba Nanak and began to live there. A majority of the inhabitants of the town today are descended from those founding fathers.

³³The three Janamsakhis which mention the date of death—the fourth, i.e. *Meharban*, is incomplete as only the earlier portion of the manuscript has so far been discovered and published—mutually disagree. The *Bala* date is *Asuj vadi* 10, S. 1596, the tenth day of the dark half of the month of Asuj, in the Indian year of 1596, which would correspond to September 7, A.D. 1539. In *Puratan*, the date is *Asuj sudi* 10, S. 1595, the 10th day of the light half of the month of Asuj in the Indian year of 1595. This will advance the *Bala* date by a year. The month is the same, but with a difference of fifteen days in the actual date, as here it falls in the *light* half over against the *dark* half of the *Bala* tradition. In *Mani Singh*, the date is *Asuj sudi* 10, S. 1596, corresponding to September 22, A.D. 1539. This date has generally been relied upon by later authorities such as Karam Singh (*Gurpurb Nirnai*, p. 57), Kahan Singh (*Mahan Kosh*, p. 519), Khushwant Singh (*A History of the Sikhs*, p. 37) and Sahib Singh ("Jiwan Britant Sri Guru Nanak Devji," in *Alochna*, July–September 1968, p. 92). W. H. McLeod (*Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 101) favours the *Bala* date (September 7, 1539), especially on the basis of entries recording the Gurus' dates in the Kartarpur manuscript of the Guru Granth which is the original copy of the Scripture as compiled by Guru Arjun. The entry, in the Kartarpur manuscript, in respect of Guru Nanak's death is of crucial importance. Besides *Bala Janamsakhi*, it gains support from the tradition obtaining at Dera Baba Nanak where death anniversary of the Guru is observed on the date which coincides with it.

CHAPTER XV
CONTINUING REALITY

BHAI Gurdas characterizes in a picturesque stanza the role of Gurū Nanak as a teacher :

Guru Nanak appeared into the world :
With his coming lifted the mist
And there was light everywhere,
As when the sun rises
The stars vanish and darkness retreats,
Or as when the lion roars
The deer flee in panic.
Wheresoever the Guru set his foot,
That spot became sanctified.
Spots once sacred to the Siddhas
Do celebrate Nanak now.
Every home is turned into a *dharamsala* .
And every day into a festival of praise to the Divine.
By manifesting the Eternal Name,
The Guru redeemed all the four corners and all the nine
 realms of the earth.
God's own witness appeared in the Kali age.¹

This appraisal of Guru Nanak and his work was recorded about sixty years after his death. Its basic notions, however, must have been in formation for some time before they found such reverberating expression. The writer was both a poet and a scholar. Apart from his capacity for imaginative recreation, he could formulate intellectually. He interpreted and conceptualized aspects of the developing faith in a

¹Var I, 27.

manner both original and authentic. He was a close associate and disciple of Guru Arjun and wrote in his time—Guru Arjun who in direct spiritual descent was Nanak himself, Nanak V. Yet the memory of Guru Nanak and his teaching remained powerfully effective and this Bhai Gurdas captured eloquently in his verse.

Manifest in the imagery of the lines quoted is the apprehension of the Guru as a redeemer. His appearance in the world was an act of providence. The truth he enunciated dispelled ignorance and sin. He wandered abroad preaching. Places of worship were set up where he visited. Religion was restored to the householder. His home became his temple where he practised prayer and adoration. The Guru's message was meant for all mankind. The purpose of his coming in the Kali age, the least pious of the classical time-cycles, was to demonstrate the way of God. This sense of the transcendental and universal character of Guru Nanak's prophecy dominated Bhai Gurdas' insight. It was present among the Guru's immediate followers. This is how the writers of Janamsakhis had understood him and this is what they attempted to convey in their own style mixing myth, legend and history together. This style was the way of men of that time to say that they had encountered a charismatic being whose presence and words had revolutionized their world. The order of nature was reversed and so were the lives of many men. The crushed fields grew thick with grain, the murderous criminal turned a saint, the boiling cauldron was cooled. The very fact that myth and miracle were used becomes in this sense a historical datum. This evidence is relevant to understanding Guru Nanak and finding the true measure of his genius.

In addition to the poetical testimony of Bhai Gurdas, the stories transmitted by the Janamsakhis and the living tradition which goes back half a millennium, there is the

Guru's own word preserved in the Guru Granth. Running through this entire body of verse is one clear note of witness to the will and being of God. To this theme he was wholly committed. From this commitment arose his unbounded love, his deep compassion and active concern for the welfare of man. His compositions are devoted to musings upon the Creator and His attributes, to singing His greatness, to depicting his own lyrical realization of Him and to identifying the prevalent inequalities and injustices which he regarded as wrongs against His order. In all this he speaks as a witness to revelation. He has seen or heard something of God to which he calls the attention of men. "As the Lord sendeth His word so do I deliver it,"² reads one of his verses. Another, "Nanak proclaimeth the truth of the Eternal."³ Or, "I communicated only the command from above."⁴ Again, "I spoke only what Thou made me to speak."⁵ It is clear that Guru Nanak believed himself to be performing a divinely appointed commission. All that follows for him—his travels, his disciples, his discourses with the Sufis and the Siddhas, the learned and the law-giver, his teaching of the mighty and the humble, his redeeming of the sick and the sinful, his perception of the tragic and the comic in the situations he encountered, his founding of Kartarpur, his laying down the rules of fraternal living, his creation of the *langar* and the holy fellowship (*sangat*), his song and his poetry—springs from this awareness.

Bhai Gurdas portrays the advent of the redeemer in the setting of a corrupted society. "The Merciful Master," he says, "heard the wail of the earth and sent down Guru Nanak." How does he portray the scene into which the

²Guru Granth, *Tilang*, p. 722.

³*Ibid.*, *Tilang*, p. 723.

⁴*Ibid.*, *Suhi*, p. 763.

⁵*Ibid.*, *Wadhans*, p. 566.

Guru came? "There prevailed such ill-will in the world. Men became split into four castes. They measured their lives into four separate *ashramas*, or stages. The sannyasis had their own ten denominations, the yogis their twelve different paths. So were the Jains divided into sects, continually in mutual conflict. The Brahmans set the Vedas, Shastras and Puranas one against another. The expounders of the six schools of philosophy created many discords and gave rise to much dissimulation. The people paid court to spells and incantations, to alchemy and thaumaturgy. From one God they had made many, and carved countless well wrought and not-so-well wrought forms in stone and wood. All were lost in superstitiousness."⁶

"As there were castes among the Hindus, so there were sects among the Muslims. Useless conflicts prevailed among them. The Ganges and Benares were sacred to the Hindus and Mecca and Ka'aba to the Muslims. For Hindus religion consisted in the sacred thread and the forehead mark, for Muslims in circumcision. Ram and Rahim were the same One God; yet two divergent courses were drawn from Him. The Hindus neglected the teachings of their books, the Muslims those of their scripture. Both had succumbed to worldly temptation. The Brahmans and the Mullahs squabbled endlessly and the truth was passed by. None ever gained liberation thus."⁷

Bhai Gurdas' description stresses the point that religious life at the time of Guru Nanak had become concerned with the externals. Form took precedence. Outward observance was established as an end in itself. The reality of faith was lost in the superstition which dominated men's lives. Discords made in the name of religion disrupted and devitalized society. For the common man, be he Hindu or Muslim,

⁶*Var* I, 19.

⁷*Ibid.*, I, 21.

CONTINUING REALITY

religion was centred in external authority and was expressed in conventional ceremony and ritual. For the Hindu community religious authority rested in the Brahmins as a class. What was required of the common man was the performance of practices laid down for his caste. To this he gave unquestioned obedience. For the Muslim, faith was anchored in the authority of the *'ulama* who interpreted for him his duty. This dominance of religion by authoritarian, ritualistic and morally indifferent formalism was a phenomenon then common to both East and West. Also common to both was the beginning of a criticism of it and a search for an inner, personal faith. Just as Western Christendom was being awakened to new vitality by the preaching of Martin Luther and John Calvin, in India an impulse for reconstruction issued from the teaching of Guru Nanak. There is no historical link between the great leaders of the age of reform in these mutually remote areas of the world, yet illuminating parallels are seen in the way the two movements originated and in the motives that inspired them. There was a common criticism of superstition and idolatry, of false teaching and ritual. Faith was declared by reformers in East and West as man's personal relationship to God. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were what the philosopher Karl Jaspers would characterize as an "Axial Era" in human history. It was a time in which the human spirit felt stirred to find anew the authentic in religion. In this age of turning, Guru Nanak was to light the way into the future for the religions of India.

Just as important as his attestation of the eternal verities was Guru Nanak's role in reformation. Earlier Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Sufis had proclaimed the ideal of purity of devotion as well as conduct and indicated the way to religious reconciliation and regeneration. But it was Guru Nanak who created the means for realizing in a practical

way the potential of these developments. In his intuition spiritual and temporal claims were wrought into a single focus and he presented an integrated and substantive view of human destiny. He questioned more effectively the current assumptions and values and, in the mode he had established, life seemed to swing from its old ways into new. To quote Joseph Davey Cunningham :

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Hindu mind was no longer stagnant or retrogressive; it had been leavened with Muhammadanism, and changed and quickened for a new development. Ramanand and Gorakh had preached religious equality, and Chaitan had repeated that faith levelled caste. Kabir had denounced images, and appealed to the people in their own tongue, and Vallabh had taught that effectual devotion was compatible with the ordinary duties of the world. But these good and able men appear to have been so impressed with the nothingness of this life, that they deemed the amelioration of man's social condition to be unworthy of a thought. They aimed chiefly at emancipation from priestcraft, or from the grossness of idolatry and polytheism. They formed pious associations of contented Quietists, or they gave themselves up to the contemplation of futurity in the hope of approaching bliss, rather than called upon their fellow creatures to throw aside every social as well as religious trammel, and to arise a new people freed from the debasing corruption of ages. They perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nations, and their sects remain to this day as they left them. It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.*

One conspicuous mark of Guru Nanak's teaching was its spirit of affirmation. It took the world as real and embraced man's life in its various aspects. Withdrawal was considered the negation of faith. Contrary to the prevailing notion of

* *A History of the Sikhs*, 1849, pp. 39-40.

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piety, the emphasis was not on turning away from reality but on a willing, even joyous, acceptance of it. In one of his hymns Guru Nanak said :

Real are Thy realms and real Thy universes,
Real are Thy worlds and real the created forms.
Real are Thine acts and real Thy purposes.
Real is Thy fiat and real Thy court,
Real is Thy order and real Thy word.
Real is Thy mercy and real Thy mark of grace.
Millions call upon Thee as True Reality.
Real is the energy Thou hast created.
Real is Thy name and real Thy praise.
Real is Thy Nature, Eternal Sovereign!⁹

Guru Nanak thus proclaimed the world to be the creation of God, reflecting the divine being and divine purpose. By placing a positive value on the natural order, he brought worldly structures—the family, the social and economic systems—within the orbit of religious concern. Human life was considered an opportunity for an individual to develop personally by practising piety and by devoting himself to the service of his fellowmen thereby improving man's condition as a whole. "The body," said Guru Nanak, "is the palace, the temple, the house of God : into it He has put His eternal light."¹⁰ The life of faith was not to lead men away from this world. The true man of faith did not retreat from the world, but

battled in open field,
with his mind perfectly in control
and with his heart poised in love,
all the time.¹¹

⁹Guru Granth, *Asa*, p. 463.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, *Malar*, p. 1256.

¹¹*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 931.

From this attitude of acceptance and affirmation was derived a keen concern for the actual life-situation of the day. Guru Nanak displayed a highly developed awareness in treating of it. His compositions sketch a sensitive picture of the prevalent confusion and crisis. For this social criticism alone his work would be of remarkable relevance and significance. From the high-handedness of the kings to the injustices and inequalities which permeated the system, nothing was outside the scope of his contemplation. He frankly censured the state and held it responsible for many of the sins of the society in his time. He uncovered the moral decay that had set in under despotic rule. He showed how cant, hypocrisy and superstition passed under the name of religion, how people began aping the dress and language of the masters and how life in general was being drained of healthful and constructive impulses. For him the Brahmans and Mullahs whose piety had been reduced to an effete, soulless routine, unjust Qazis and other state functionaries, empty customs and ritualism and institutions such as caste were the symbols of contemporary decadence and these became the subjects of his sarcasm. He disapproved of idolatry, polytheism and the attendant sacerdotalism and there was powerful exposure made in his hymns of the superstitions of the Hindu and the Muslim alike and of the formalism which dominated their religious practices. The invasion of the country by Babar's armies roused his concern. He was appalled by the pusillanimity shown by the rulers of India in meeting the challenge. The *shabads* he uttered on this theme are unexcelled for their power of expression and moral keenness. His poetry has important social meaning. Nowhere else in contemporary literature are the issues in the medieval Indian situation comprehended with such clarity or presented in tones of greater urgency.

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Of the times in general Guru Nanak said :

The times are like a drawn knife, the kings like butchers,
And righteousness hath fled on wings.
The dark night of falsehood prevaieth,
The moon of truth is nowhere visible.¹²

And again :

Sin is the king and greed the minister,
and falsehood their chief agent.
Lust is their constant counsellor.
The people are ignorant
and supinely render fealty.
Priests dance and play music,
make all kinds of masquerade,
and shriek and scream while singing balladry.
Fools pass for learned ones, sophistry for wisdom,
and everyone seeks nothing but pelf.
Those who do good acts forfeit the merit
by asking for deliverance as reward.
Some call themselves men of continence,
But they know not the way and in ignorance
abandon their homes.

* * * * *

Some perform the Hindu worship at home,
But they read the Qur'an in public
and observe the code of the ruling Turks.
Oh! Give up the pretence, friends!!
They who eat men say regularly their *namaz*.
They who wear the sacred thread
use knives to cut men's throats.
And they call priests to their homes
to perform the rites of worship.

* * * * *

Modesty and honour are nowhere in sight,
Nanak, falsehood prevaieth everywhere.

¹²Guru Granth, *Majh*, p. 145.

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They who put the sacred marks on their foreheads
and girt their waists with loincloth,
Become butchers for the world with knives in their hands.
To win the favour of the rulers,
they clad themselves in blue.¹³

This sense of discontent with what he saw emerges through several of the Guru's *shabads*. It found expression repeatedly in his references to cruel and unjust monarchs, fawning, corrupt ministers and officials, pharisaical priests and leaders of religious sects. Neither did he condone the ascetics who disowned the world and in their despondent outlook became a burden to the community. He spoke often with humour more than anger. Yet his purpose was always clear. He had deep sympathy for the common mass of people and had a strong feeling of kinship with them. He said, "Lowly among the lowliest am I—the lowliest of all. I am with them and to them I belong. I envy not the mighty."¹⁴ Further on he proclaimed that "where the poor are owned there will God's grace be manifested." Any imposition on the people hurt him and excited his compassion. He protested against oppression of every kind. An open tragedy like the one that struck Saidpur was sure to move him profoundly. Yet there were in his response to it certain individual elements. He made the woes of the inhabitants of the unfortunate town his own and experienced in his heart the agony and sorrow of the moment. From this deep feeling issued poetry intensely human, vivid and meaningful, instinct with an artistic awareness of ironic fate. The pathetic imagery however was informed by a perceptive conscience. The incident was not treated as an isolated one, but placed in the larger social and historical perspective. Decline in moral standards must lead to chaos. A corrupt political

¹³*Ibid.*, *Asa*, pp. 468–72.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 15.

system has in it the germs of its dissolution. Lure of power divides men and violence unresisted tends to flourish. It could not be wished away by magic or sorcery. The Guru reiterates his faith in the Almighty and His justice. But so acute was his realization of the distress of the people that he could not resist making the complaint, "When there was such suffering, such killing, such shrieking in pain, didst not Thou, O God, feel pity? Creator, Thou art the same for all!" The people for him were the Indian people as a whole, Hindus and Muslims, the high-caste and the low-caste, soldiers and civilians, men and women.

In spite of some of the conciliatory trends, the Hindu-Muslim polarity was a persistent factor in the Indian life. Guru Nanak had clearly seen beyond this and declared early in his career, "There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman." All his teaching and work had been a substantiation of this statement. In his discerning appraisal of the total Indian situation in his time and in the practical way in which he addressed himself to some of the deeply rooted problems and shortcomings and to reshaping the social mores and bringing into play new elements, Guru Nanak transcended the rather limited framework of other contemporary advocates of reform belonging mainly to the mystic orders in Hinduism and Islam.

Emphasis on equality and ethical conduct took precedence in Guru Nanak's scheme of reform. The society in which he lived was torn with divisions. There were antagonistic religious communities each with its own sects and castes. There were classes condemned to perpetual subservience. No common point of appeal to the people as a whole existed. Guru Nanak began by saying that One, Eternal and Infinite God was the creator of all things. All His creatures were equal before Him and to make distinctions among them was sinful. The designations of Hindu and Musalman meant

nothing to him. He pointed the way for people to look across these. "There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman." All men were God's own creation. "Two ways are made out. But is not One God the master of all, Hindus and Muslims?" "False," he said, "is caste, and false the titled fame. One Supreme Lord sustains all."¹⁵ "Know men by their worth. Do not ask their caste. There is no caste in the next world."¹⁶ "Neither caste nor position will be recognized hereafter. They alone will be pronounced good whose merit is reckoned worthy of honour."¹⁷ "Neither caste nor birth will be enquired . . . As thou actest so will be thy caste and thy status."¹⁸

Guru Nanak was acutely conscious of the position of inferiority assigned to women. He had many bold and sympathetic words to say for them. Among his followers they were given full equality with men. In one of his *shabads*, he said :

Of woman are we born, of woman conceived,
to woman engaged, to woman married.
Woman we befriend, by woman is the civilization continued.
When woman dies, woman is sought for.
It is by woman that order is maintained.
Then why call her evil from whom are great men born?
From woman is woman born,
and without woman none should exist.
The eternal Lord is the only one, O Nanak,
Who depends not on woman.¹⁹

The last couplet proclaims the Guru's belief, repeatedly expressed in his hymns, that God is self-created and above the cycle of life and death.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Sri, p. 83.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Asa, p. 349.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, Asa, p. 469.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Parbhathi, p. 1330.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Asa, p. 473.

Guru Nanak discounted the houseless state and insisted that salvation was won in the world itself—"amid its laughter and sport, fineries and foods."²⁰ He firmly supported marriage and family. In the home alone could man fully realize his destiny. How should he conduct himself in the world? A symbolism frequently used is that of the lotus-flower which remains in the pond untouched by its impurities. Living thus "in the midst of wife and children one would," said the Guru, "gain emancipation."²¹ "By a life of service in this world alone will one become entitled to a seat in the next."²² "There can be no love of God without service."²³

Service, devotion and love were accounted as of real importance. "He who cherisheth a sight of His gate, careth not either for liberation or heaven," said the Guru.²⁴ Practical virtue was made an essential ingredient of piety. "Truth is higher than everything, but higher than truth is true living."²⁵ For this life of truth, love and service there were no substitutes. Outward forms, formulas, incantations, image-worship, esoteric observances, charities and pilgrimages did not avail. The giving of alms out of ill-gotten gains was commented upon thus, "If a thief robs a house and out of his booty gives away alms for the sake of his forefathers, . . . they will be regarded as thieves and the go-between will have his hands chopped off. For that is justice."²⁶ So were renunciation, austerities and penances rejected. "Some worship stones, some go to visit places of pilgrimage and some take their abode in the forests. They

²⁰*Ibid.*, V, *Gujri*, p. 522.

²¹*Ibid.*, *Dhanasari*, p. 661.

²²*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 26.

²³*Ibid.*, *Japuji*, p. 4.

²⁴*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 360.

²⁵*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 62.

²⁶*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 472.

roam and they falter. How can one become pure until the mind is rid of contamination? He is honoured who achieves the truth.”²⁷ But “truth is not achieved by mere performance of prescribed acts.”²⁸ “Bathing in sacred pools will not help if one has not shed one’s ego.”²⁹ “Nor will the sacred mark on the brow or the *janeu* profit.”³⁰ “Useless is worship without faith, restraints without truth and *janeu* without self-control. You may wash and bathe and run the mark of your caste across your forehead. Yet purity will not be attained without pure conduct.”³¹

These were the words addressed to the Brahman. To the Muslim the Guru said, “It is not easy to be called a Musalman. If there were one let him be so known. He should first take to his heart the tenets of his faith and purge himself of all pride. He will be a Muslim who pursues the path shown by the founder of the creed, who extinguishes anxiety about life and death, who accepts the will of God as supreme, who has faith in the Creator and surrenders himself to the Almighty. When he has established his goodwill for all, O Nanak, will he be called a Musalman.”³² And to the yogi, “Religion lies not in the patched garment, nor in his staff, nor in besmearing the body with ashes. Religion lies not in suspending large rings from split ears, nor in shaving the head, nor in the blowing of horns. To live uncontaminated amid worldly temptations is to find the secret of religion. Religion lies not in empty words. He who regards all men as equal is religious. Religion lies not in wandering outside to tombs and places of cremation, nor in postures of contemplation. Religion lies not in roaming

²⁷*Ibid.*, *Dhanasari*, p. 686.

²⁸*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 355.

²⁹*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 61.

³⁰*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 467.

³¹*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 903.

³²*Ibid.*, *Majh*, p. 141.

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abroad, nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage. To live uncontaminated amid worldly temptations is to find the secret of religion.”³³ Thus spoke Guru Nanak to the Vaishnavite and the Shaivite, the tantrist and the penitent, the sannyasi and the dervish, the Bhakta and the Sufi, the Pandit and the Mullah, the Jain and the Siddha. Through them he was speaking not only to the contemporary situation but to men of every age. His purpose was not to criticize any sect or order, but to call the attention of the people to the persistent fallacies which distorted the essential integrity of humanity. All the time he was asking them to press beyond rituals to recover the basis and motivation for truthful, moral action. He believed that “no one ever reached paradise by subscribing to mere forms. One secured release only by practising the truth.”³⁴

Guru Nanak stressed the futility of charms, spells and the many superstitious observances then widely current. Just as he was concerned to establish the true values of faith and the purity of religious practice, he sought to free the people’s minds from the pervading spirit of fear. He had spoken of the oppression by authority, political as well as ecclesiastical, and of social inequity. He also perceived the harmful effects of mental enslavement and wished to see the people outgrow their inertia and credulousness. He asked them to rid themselves of the influence of the sadhus and the faqirs. “Show no reverence,” he said, “to those who call themselves *gurus* and *pirs* but go about begging for alms. They who live by their own labour and share the fruit with the others alone have found the right path.”³⁵ He denounced belief in magic and mantras and the irrational notions of defilement by touch and impurity said to attach to occasions such as

³³*Ibid.*, *Suhi*, p. 730.

³⁴*Ibid.*, *Majh*, p. 141.

³⁵*Ibid.*, *Sarang*, p. 1245.

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childbirth. Men were all equal and there was, according to him, no question of one born in a certain class being polluted by the touch of him born in another. He said :

If you believe in pollution at birth,
there is pollution everywhere.
There are creatures in cow-dung [considered sacred by Hindus],
and in wood.
There is life in each grain of corn.
Water is the source of life
and sap for all things.
Then how can one escape pollution?
Pollution pollutes only the ignorant.
The pollution of the mind is greed,
the pollution of the tongue lying.
The pollution of the eyes is to look with covetousness
upon another's wealth, upon another's wife
and upon the beauty of another's woman.
The pollution of the ears is to listen to slander.
The pollution in which the people commonly believe
is all superstition.
Birth and death are by divine will,
by divine will men come and go.
What is given to us to eat and drink is pure.
They who have arrived upon the truth
remain untouched by pollution.³⁶

Like birth, death was by God's will and, as such, not to be dreaded. "Death," said Guru Nanak, "was the privilege of the brave."³⁷ Such language was unique in an age dominated by timidity and apprehensiveness. Death was not to be regarded as the unspeakable dread that crippled every moment of life, but the portal by which men entered a new realm of God's wisdom and love. Many

³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 472.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, *Wadhans*, p. 579.

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shabads can be quoted from his compositions similar in tenor to some of the mystical poetry of that time, though in such hymns also the unique quality of his imaginative and aesthetic intuition will be easily distinguishable. But there are many more, singular in style and character. In understanding and analyzing the true nature of the Guru's legacy the departures he registered have to be especially noted. Reference has been made to the ringing note of protest in his utterances and his social consciousness—characteristics in which he was distinctly in advance of his times. But he did not confine himself to decrying the evils of his decadent age. He not only recognized the prevailing woes and shortcomings, but also proceeded to set in motion a current of practical reform. If he said that all men are equal, he established the *Guru ka Langar* emphasizing in the common meal true fellowship and equality. To the *sangats*, or holy associations, which sprang up in the wake of his preaching men and women were admitted without distinctions of caste and creed. To recall people from their indolence, resignation and masochistic self-depreciation, he taught them to put their trust in One Formless God, and make this faith the basis of a chaste and courageous living. *Sewa*, or the spirit of active love and service, was presented as the highest ideal. The seeker was expected to live in the world, engage himself in normal activity, never forswearing his moral obligation, and to become an active agent in promoting the social ends of the community. *Kirat karni, wand chhakna te nam japna*, i.e., to earn one's living by honest labour, to share with others the fruit of the exertion and to pursue the discipline of *Nam* (absorption in God's Name) was the maxim which summed up the instruction of Guru Nanak. It became the operative principle in the life of the community that grew around him.

All of Guru Nanak's teaching is set forth in verse. His

genius was best expressed in the poetical attitude. No other way would have been adequate to the range and depth of his mood—his fervent longing for the Infinite, his joy and wonder at the beauty and vastness of His creation, his tender love for his fellowmen, his moral speculation and his concern at the suppression and exaction to which the people in his day were subject. His compositions reveal an abounding imagination and a subtle aesthetic sensitivity. The language in which his hymns were composed was Punjabi—the common tongue of the people among whom he was born. This choice itself was significant. For the first time Punjabi was used extensively and consistently for literary expression of this order. The fact was illustrative of the process of resurgence which the regional languages all over India were then undergoing. The results for Punjabi were dramatic. From a spoken tongue it turned in Guru Nanak's hands into a subtle medium of self-revelation. The creative energy it acquired from him informed its subsequent growth and continues to be a vital influence to this day.

Guru Nanak treated the language with delicacy and innovation. The core of his vocabulary was the speech of the common man in the Punjab of his day. To this he brought fresh elements from his power of vivid imagery and from his vigorous observation and extensive experience of travel and contact with a variety of people. He freely drew upon the terminology of the Upanishads accessible to him through the Sant tradition, of the yogis, Siddhas and Sufis. When he was addressing his words to a Muslim, he tended to depend more on Persian and Arabic. There are *shabads* by him in Apabhramsa Hindwi and at least two in which Sanskrit predominates. Yet in the main body of his verse ingredients from diverse sources blend together and the impression is given of aptness and harmony. The most characteristic quality of his poetry is the eloquence of its sym-

bolism and the down-to-earth, sinewy presence of its Punjabi vocabulary. Guru Nanak's figures were taken from all different aspects of life in the Punjab—farming, the trades and the crafts, the ceremonial observed by various faiths and sects, conjugal life, hunting, music, dancing, games such as chess and *chaupar* and the amusements of rope-dancers, acrobats and mimics. He revealed a close familiarity with peasants, artisans, diverse characters in contemporary religious life, figures of Puranic mythology, birds and animals, flowers and trees, the state regalia, gradations of bureaucratic rank, bridal toilet, articles of luxury, and so on. In the imagery drawn from farming Guru Nanak enunciates how truth might be reaped, "Make body the field, the mind the ploughman, honest labour the irrigating water. Sow the seed of the Lord's Name. Let contentment be the leveller and humility the fence. With deeds of love the seed will fertilize."³⁸ And again, "If good actions be your farm and if you sow it with the seed of Divine Word and water it daily with truth, you would be a good farmer and reap the crop of faith. Then will you know the reality of Heaven and Hell."³⁹ God has been called the farmer *par excellence*.⁴⁰ Guru Nanak designated himself as His bailiff.⁴¹ The world is to the Creator what clay-pots are to the potter.⁴² The four-fold division of the time-cycle has been compared to four sides of the *chaupar*-board, creatures to chessmen. "The dice is cast by the Creator Himself.⁴³ Beaten is his chessman who does not gain favour in the Lord's court. He never wins the board."⁴⁴ A man devoid of God's remembrance is

³⁸*Ibid.*, *Sorath*, p. 595.

³⁹*Ibid.*, *Sri*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 19.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, *Wadhans*, p. 557.

⁴²*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 432.

⁴³*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 434.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 359.

compared to a wall with sand inside it⁴⁵ and a mind without peace to the forest-deer skipping out stealthily to nibble at young sprout.⁴⁶ The fisherman's net ensnaring unsuspecting fish is the metaphor used to describe death.⁴⁷ The guilty man who dissembles and bends low to show his humbleness is likened to a hunter who bows down to take aim at the deer.⁴⁸

The ravages caused by foreign invasions turned into telling imagic features in Guru Nanak's apprehension and supplied some of the symbolism of his poetry. Describing how man is overwhelmed by the five enemies, i.e., lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego, he wrote, "They are five whereas I am alone. How shall I defend my home and property against them? . . . The citadel (body) was demolished, the temple inside was plundered and the lone woman (soul) was captured."⁴⁹ In this simile are mirrored the scenes of destruction the country had witnessed repeatedly. Humorous observation was not foreign to Guru Nanak's insight. This was in fact more in character with his genial and robust temperament. "Of little worth," reads a couplet, "is the cow without milk, the bird without wings, the vegetation without water, the king without *salaam* [who is acknowledged by nobody]."⁵⁰ Then, "He who imbibes not the Name will regret his coming into the world like a crow flying to a deserted house."⁵¹ Similarly, he who imbibes no virtue wastes away his life. "He looks in all four directions bewildered like a trader without merchandise."⁵² To quote another

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 934.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 932.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 55.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 470.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, *Gauri*, p. 155.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, *Asa*, p. 354.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 58.

⁵²*Ibid.*, *Sri*, p. 56.

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verse, "What is cold to a stone or home-life to a eunuch?"⁵³

The underlying singleness of theme which inspired Guru Nanak's verse led to some inevitable repetition. But it was rescued from plain uniformity by the variety of his language and imagery as well as metre. His creative impulse held its sublime level through extensive stretches of composition. No prosaic moralizing was permitted to stifle the ardour of his inspiration. In addition, there was variation in mood—from mystical and lyrical to philosophical and critical, from devotional and contemplative to aesthetic and sensuous. This was accompanied by an awareness of his role of poetic revelation. More than once in his compositions he referred to himself with the designation of poet. He revelled in this office. He was happiest singing the infiniteness of God and of the creation flowing from Him. He sang of the Divine both in His impersonal and personal aspects—as devoid of all attributes, formless and ineffable, standing over against the whole realm of becoming, and as Creator who makes himself known by his Word and acts in human lives through His grace. His yearning for Him, rendered often in the allegory of conjugal love, and his descriptions of nature have provided the Punjabi language with some of its literary masterpieces. This poetry contains one of the most intimate and magnificent expressions of faith in the Transcendent. It is a seriously given testament about God's existence and a sterling statement of a deeply experienced vision of Him. Yet underlying this is a spirit of utter humility and the consciousness that Reality was beyond limit and ultimately unknowable. In the *Japuji* Guru Nanak said :

There is no limit to the praises of Him that are being sung,
no end to the ways in which He is described.
There is no limit to what He doth for us,
and no end to what He giveth.

⁵³*Ibid.*, *Majh*, p. 143.

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There is no limit to what He seeth,
and no limit to what He heareth.
None can divine the limit of His purposes,
None can know the limit of what He hath brought into being,
and of the nature and size of all that exists.
Many yearn to discover His limit,
but His limit cannot be fixed.
None know the limit.
The more we say the greater He seemeth to become.
Great is the Lord, high His seat,
and higher than the highest His Name.
He that would know how high He is
must first be as high as He is.
How great He is He alone knoweth.
What is given us is by His bounty and grace alone.⁵⁴

The natural beauty and sincerity of Guru Nanak's song had a convincing power. This became an important element in his way of teaching. Another influential factor was music of which he made extensive use. Above all was the attraction of his own person. He lived among men with graciousness and humility. Few could resist his intensely human and sympathetic manner. The fame of his holy life was widely spread and drew towards him men from all sects and strata. He had an especially charming and spontaneous way with the crowds. He mixed with them freely and showed great presence of mind and courage in dealing with them. He could improvise gestures humorous and dramatic to provoke their observation and interest. Thus he won his audiences instantly. The teaching was indirect and incidental, never direct or by didactic discourse. A common method was the recitation of hymns of his own composition, accompanied by Mardana on the rebeck. The power of his words and his self-effaced, deeply absorbed personality touched the hearts of men. His own pure example and the earnestness

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, *Japuji*, p. 5.

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of his moral precepts awakened their conscience. For many this meant complete transformation of their lives. Guru Nanak discountenanced miracles as a means of spreading his message. He declared that these supernatural or miraculous powers did not belong to the spiritual way of life: they "were extraneous matters altogether."⁵⁵

His teaching was addressed to all men. For this, or for any other purpose, he recognized no differences of caste, race or religion. He treated all sects and communities alike. He spoke to Hindus and Muslims, Siddhas and Sufis in the same tone. He attacked sterile ceremonial forms, but never any religion. In his spirit of tolerance and consideration towards the faiths of other men, Guru Nanak showed a remarkably modern sensibility. His conception of reform in religion was liberal. It was broader than that of a Bhakti teacher or a cultic reformer. He broke new ground in contemplating not only the removal of certain abuses, but, ultimately, the unity of religion. In calling upon Hindus to become better Hindus and upon Muslims to become better Muslims he was pointing towards a new religious culture.

It would, however, be wrong to picture him as undertaking a kind of syncretistic union between Hinduism and Islam. He was not striving to achieve a judicious mixture of elements from each that would be acceptable to all. His intention was more radical. He was seeking a new religious alternative beyond what was to be found in conventional Hindu or Islamic belief. This could be arrived at by penetrating more deeply into the basic core of ethical and spiritual truth in all the great religious traditions. It is the external and conventional shell of religion that divides men. Its essence unites. Guru Nanak visualizes a humanity enriched by a moral faith large enough to embrace all, in which mankind is free of religious antagonism because men's

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, *Japuji*, p. 6.

hearts and minds are grounded on the Real. The inner coherence and uniqueness of Guru Nanak's teachings fulfil rather than deny those of other traditions and teachers.

Since Guru Nanak's message is conveyed in poetical form, it does not have the coherence of a reasoned or systematic treatise. His genius was artistic rather than philosophical, moral rather than cerebral. Yet his poetry represents a striking intellectual discipline. His teachings emerge from his exalted hymns as an organic whole and any apparent contradictions disappear if they are studied together. In these, influences can be traced of earlier traditions. All great religions of the world had their precursors. Gautama and early Buddhism were preceded by the intellectual critics of Brahmanic orthodoxy and exponents of severe yogic asceticism. Jesus and primitive Christianity show the influence of Hebrew prophets, Essene sectarians and rabbinic teachers. Similarly, Guru Nanak was the product of his times and of the heritage that had come to him. But his originality, like that of the other great teachers, lies in his reassertion of the eternal truths and in what he made of his inheritance and what he created out of the matrix of his own personality.

To assure the community of his disciples a continuing witness to his teachings, Guru Nanak appointed a successor. The succession of teachers and leaders was not to be dynastic, and thus he bypassed his own sons. A disciple was chosen and was made by the Guru an equal with himself. He transmitted to him not only his responsibilities but, as the poets declared, his light as well. Guru Nanak saw his successor in his own image and paid him the reverence due to the Guru when he proclaimed his succession. This procedure was repeated successively over eight generations. The Sikh community thus had ten spiritual guides succeeding one another, who are regarded with equal adoration and honour. They were

conscious witnesses to the presence of Guru Nanak guiding the community that had developed under his care.

There is interesting contemporary testimony to the pervasive influence of Guru Nanak among his followers as mediated through the other Gurus. Satta and Balwand, the minstrels who recited the holy hymns for the Second Guru, Angad, thus sang in an ode which is preserved in the Guru Granth, "Guru Nanak invested Lehna with the mark of Guruship . . . He, i.e., Guru Angad, had the same light, the same method; it is the Master who had changed his body."⁵⁶ About the Third and Fourth Gurus, Amar Das and Ram Das, they said, "The wise being, Guru Nanak, descended in the form of Amar Das . . . The sect was astonished to see Nanak's canopy over Amar Das' head. Guru Amar Das obtained the same throne, and the same court . . . Hail, hail, Guru Ram Das! God who created thee hath decorated thee . . . Thou art Nanak; Thou art Lehna; thou art Amar Das."⁵⁷

Bhai Gurdas, in one of his odes, said, "In his lifetime Nanak installed Lehna and conferred on him the regalia of Guruship. Guru Nanak turned himself into Angad by transferring his light to him . . . Angad had the same mark, the same umbrella over his head and was seated on the same true throne as Guru Nanak. The seal from Guru Nanak's hand passed on to Guru Angad's and thus was his sovereignty proclaimed . . . Lehna obtained the gift from Nanak and to the house of Amar Das it must descend."⁵⁸ And, then, on to Ram Das, Arjun and Hargobind. "Arjun," says Bhai Gurdas, "transformed himself into Hargobind and chiselled his own image upon him."⁵⁹

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 966.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, *Ramkali*, p. 968.

⁵⁸*Var I*, 45.

⁵⁹*Var I*, 46.

This awareness of the personality of Guru Nanak acting amidst them through the successor-Gurus was so permeant among the Sikhs that Mobid Zulfiqar Ardastani writing a century after him in his Persian work *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* said, "The Sikhs say that when Nanak left his body, he absorbed himself in Guru Angad who was his most devoted disciple, and that Guru Angad was Nanak himself. After that, at the time of his death, Guru Angad entered into the body of Amar Das. He in the same manner occupied a place in the body of Ram Das, and Ram Das in the same way got united with Arjun . . . They say that whoever does not acknowledge Guru Arjun to be the very self of Baba Nanak becomes a non-believer."⁶⁰

Guru Gobind Singh, last of the Gurus, himself wrote in his poetical autobiography called *Bachitar Natak*, "Nanak assumed the body of Angad . . . Afterwards Nanak was called Amar Das, as one lamp is lit from another . . . The holy Nanak was revered as Angad. Angad was recognized as Amar Das. And Amar Das became Ram Das . . . When Ram Das was blended with the Divine, he gave the Guruship to Arjun. Arjun appointed Hargobind in his place and Hargobind gave his seat to Har Rai. Har Krishan, his son, then became Guru. After him came Tegh Bahadur."⁶¹

This oneness, this unity of the Gurus came home to the Sikhs through their belief in the presence of Guru Nanak in them. For the Gurus themselves this presence was a constant reality, an inspiration and the norm in the exercise of their spiritual office. They wrote religious verse in the name of the First Guru. All their hymns in the Guru Granth bear the *nom-de-plume* of Nanak. Thus we have the compositions of Nanak I, Nanak II, Nanak III, and so on. They have a remarkable correspondence of tone and concept: in both

⁶⁰*Nanak Panthis*, in "Panjab Past and Present," April 1967, p. 55.

⁶¹*Bachitar Natak*, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, pp. 56-57.

CONTINUING REALITY

utterance and deed later Gurus, Nanaks themselves as the followers believe, were acting out the inspiration mediated to them from Guru Nanak.

The development of Sikh thought and life may be understood as the outcome of the interaction of the original impulse imparted by Guru Nanak and the exigencies of contemporary social environment. Challenges arose : new situations demanded and elicited new answers. Points of transfiguration were reached and worked out. Yet it is possible to discern in this process a basic harmony and continuity attributable primarily to the ever-present Nanak legend.

Each of the successor-Gurus contributed towards the evolution of the creed and civil organization in accordance with the spirit of the teaching inherited from Guru Nanak and the existing historical factors. The Fifth Guru, Arjun, for instance, gave the Sikhs their holy book, the Granth Sahib, and their Mecca, the Harmandir, now the Golden Temple of Amritsar. In the holy book which he compiled he included the hymns of his predecessors and his own and of some of the saints, both Hindu and Muslim. Among the latter were Ramanand, Kabir, Namdev and the Sufi mystic Shaikh Farid. The foundation of the Sikh shrine at Amritsar was laid at the request of the Fifth Guru by the well-known Muslim divine Mian Mir. To the growing intolerance of the ruling authority Guru Arjun responded by resignedly accepting martyrdom with extreme torture : his successor by sanctioning the use of arms. Seeing how peaceable means had failed to secure for the rising sect immunity from oppression, the latter recognized this as a lawful alternative. He chose himself a warrior's equipment for the ceremonies of succession and put on two swords, declaring one to be the symbol of his spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. The Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, was the second

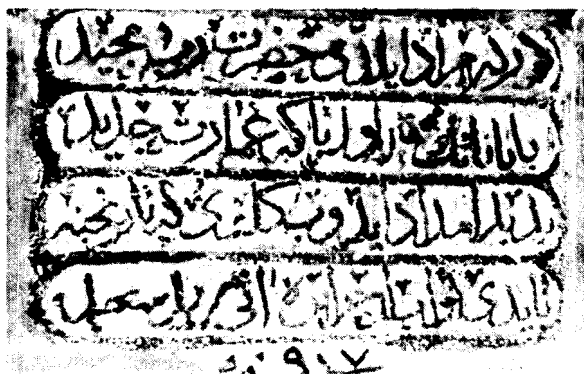
of the Gurus to be executed under Imperial orders.

History from henceforward took a more decisive turn in a series of events now well known. In the midst of warfare and great suffering a firm hold was maintained on the insights which had been the guiding principles since the time of Guru Nanak. The struggle which Guru Gobind Singh had to endure was held to be God's way of fulfilling Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Gobind Singh's own verse, no different from Guru Nanak's in its transcendental quality, bears witness to the certainty of this conviction. In practice a strictly ethical and moral discipline was evolved and adhered to. No differentiation was made between the Hindu and the Muslim. Several staunch followers of Islam did, in fact, align themselves with the Guru against the Imperial armies. Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim leader of considerable religious influence, took part in battle on his side along with his sons and disciples. A joint, harmonious Hindu-Muslim being was as much a reality in Guru Gobind Singh's vision as in Guru Nanak's. To quote a hymn by Guru Gobind Singh :

...Hindus and Muslims are one!
The same Lord is the creator and nourisher of all;
Recognize no distinctions between them.
The monastery and the mosque are the same;
So are the Hindu *puja* and the Muslim *namaz*.
Men are all one!

This might well have been a quotation from Guru Nanak.

APPENDIX I



Reproduced above is a photograph of the Baghdad inscription taken at the time of the author's visit to the city in August, 1969. The inscription, in Ottoman Turkish, was, at his request, deciphered by Dr Jhinasi Tekin, Lecturer on Turkish at Harvard University, Cambridge, U.S.A., as follows :

*Gor ne murad eyledi hazret-i rabb-i mejid
Baba Nanak faqir ola ta ki 'imaret jedid
yidiler imdad idup geldi ki tarihine
yapadi sevab ejr ide ani murid-i said*

He gave the following interpretation of the lines :

Look what was wished by the Glorious Lord in His majesty—
That a new establishment be built for the saint Baba Nanak.
The Seven gave help and there came this chronogram.
The blest disciple performed a meritorious work.
May He then recompense it!

Dr Tekin has scanned the quatrain thus :

○ — | — ○ ○ — | — ○ — | — ○ ○ —

APPENDIX I

The first two words in line 2, he reads as “Baba Nanak” and says that they fit in with the measure he has worked out. He also states that the word “Nanak” cannot be a genitive ending.

Dr Tekin makes the further comment that the inscription could not be older than the year 1700 or so, for the letter “p” used in the word “yapadi,” in line 4, had not come into use in Turkish by that time. Maybe, the inscription was put up when the building was renovated.

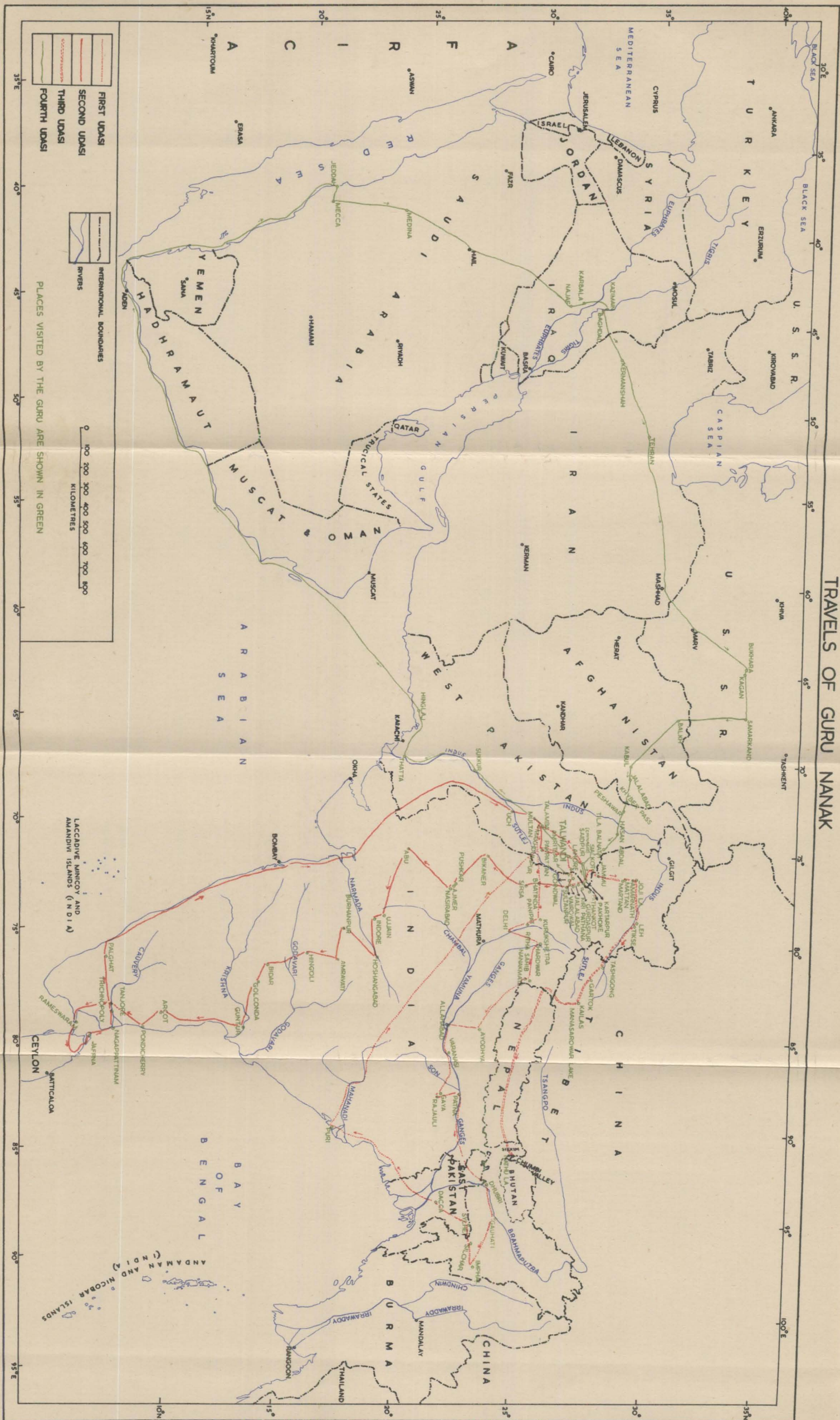
The year which is now read as 917 Hijri was in earlier photographs of the inscription read as 927. It seems the figure 2 has since been mutilated and now reads more like the figure 1.

In the literature relating to the life of Guru Nanak, the tradition about his visit to Baghdad is strong and persistent. The earliest testimony is that of Bhai Gurdas who was born twelve years after Guru Nanak and lived through the times of the five of the succeeding Gurus. He was, throughout, in close touch with them and with some of the disciples from the time of Guru Nanak himself. In one of his *Vars* he wrote about Guru Nanak’s visit to Baghdad and said :

ਫਿਰਿ ਬਾਬਾ ਗਿਆ ਬਗਦਾਦ ਨੇ,
ਬਾਹਰ ਜਾਇ ਕੀਆ ਅਸਥਾਨਾ ।

Translated into English the lines say, “The Baba, i.e., the Guru, journeyed on to Baghdad and made his seat outside the town.” This writing dates to about 60 years after Guru Nanak. It is by one who had direct access to the Sikhs of Guru Nanak’s time and to the tradition coming down from him. The statement is clear and unambiguous and the words that the Guru sat outside the town are specially meaningful in this context. The Janamsakhis also refer to his visit to Baghdad. Mention has been made of Guru Nanak having met Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani and Bahlul Shah. These references are obviously anachronistic. Maybe, Guru Nanak met the disciples or descendants of these Sufi saints. But the very fact that Baghdad and the names of the Sufi saints are connected with the tradition, indicates that there was some firm basis for the story which became current soon after Guru Nanak’s passing away.

TRAVELS OF GURU NANAK



GLOSSARY

- akk* : name of a poisonous plant; *calotropis procera*.
alif : the first letter of the Persian alphabet.
Allah : the Arabic word for God.
al-ruqum-al Hindiyyah : Indian numerals.
Alvar : Tamil Vaishnavite mystics of medieval times.
amavas : the last day of the dark fortnight of a month when the night is moonless.
amils : Muslim practitioners of magic and exorcism.
amrit : nectar; drink of immortality.
andazah : measurement; estimate.
Apabhramsa : a stage of the Indo-Aryan language between the Prakrits and the modern Indian languages.
arati : ceremonial worship by means of lighted lamps.
ashrama : refers to the four stages of life of a man recognized in Brahmanical scheme, namely, *Brahmacharya* (period of study), *Grihastha* (period spent with family), *Vanaprastha* (period spent in forest-dwelling) and *Sannyasa* (withdrawal from the world).
atit : one who has forsaken the world; an ascetic.
bar : wild country of thorny shrubs and bushes.
Baramaha : a poetical composition celebrating the twelve months of the year.
bari : big, senior.
bairagi : a recluse; one who is free from all passion (raga).
Bedi : Sanskrit, Vedi; name of a Kashatriya sub-caste.
ber : jujube tree; *zizyphus jujuba*.
bhakta : devotee; pietist.
bhakti : loving personal devotion to chosen deities or to God; piety; devout loyalty.
bigha : a unit of land below the acre, with varying measurement in different parts of the Punjab.
Brahma : Vedic-Puranic god of creation; the first deity of the Hindu Triad.

GLOSSARY

- chaliha* : from *chehl*, meaning “forty;” a forty-day penance.
chaudhri : title or designation of a village revenue official.
chaupar : name of an Indian game; four-fold cross-board on which the game is played.
Chet : Sanskrit, Chaitra; name of Indian month corresponding to March-April.
Chishti : name of a Sufi order founded by Khwaja Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti in India.
Chona : name of a Kashatriya sub-caste.
dargah : tomb or shrine of a reputed Muslim saint.
degha : cauldron.
dharamsala : a place of piety; house of charity and worship.
digambar : literally, sky-clad; nude; name of a sect of Jainism.
dum : name of a tribe of musician-drummers among Indian Muslims; a *mirasi*.
Dwazdah Maha : Persian word for *Baramaha*.
faqir : a religious mendicant; saint; devotee.
Gauri : name of musical mode or measure.
ghee : clarified butter.
gosht : Sanskrit, goshti; dialogue; discussion.
gurdwara : a Sikh sanctuary or shrine; a place of devotion and charity.
Gurmukhi : name of the script for the Punjabi language. The Guru Granth is written in this script.
guru : preceptor; prophet-teacher.
Guru Granth : Adi Granth, i.e. the Original Scripture; the Holy Book of the Sikhs.
hajj : the pilgrimage of Mecca prescribed as a religious duty for the Muslims.
Hari : name of Vishnu; God.
haveli : fortified building; residence of a feudal baron or chief.
Hind : Arabic name for India.
hindsah : numeral.
Izrail : the angel of death in Islamic tradition.
Jagannath : literally, Lord of the World; a name for Vishnu.
jagir : land or grant as reward for service.
janamsakhi : birth-story; name of books dealing with the life of Guru Nanak.
jand : name of a tree; *prosopis spicigera*.
janeu : sacred ceremonial thread worn by higher-caste Brahmanical Hindus.

GLOSSARY

- jangam* : a wandering ascetic.
jat : name of a tribe or caste given mostly to cultivation.
jubbah : a loose outer robe.
Jwalamukhi : literally, with flame-mouth; name of a temple-site in Kangra hills; a title of the goddess Durga.
Ka'aba : the famous Muslim sanctuary in the city of Mecca.
kabitt : a verse form.
kalima : Muslim confession of faith.
Kaliyug : literally, dark or sinful epoch; the last and worst of the four great ages of Puranic mythology.
kanphata : literally, split-ear; followers of Siddha Gorakhnath who wear rings suspended through their split-ears.
karah prashad : the Sikh sacrament.
karamat : miraculous event.
karir : a thorny shrub; *cappris aphylla*.
kashkul : a beggar's cup or bowl.
Khalifa : successor of Prophet Muhammad as temporal and spiritual head of the community and religious faith of Islam; the title of the Muslim ruler of Baghdad.
khanaqah : a hospice; monastery or shrine.
Khari Boli : colloquial form of modern Hindi; language spoken around Delhi.
Khayal : a form of song.
Khilafat : government and dominion of the Khalifa.
Khuda : the Lord; God.
koel : Indian name of the bird cuckoo.
langar : community meal or refectory attached to a Sikh place of worship where all eat together without distinctions of caste, creed or rank.
lota : an earthen or metal jug.
Madari : A Sufi order.
madrasah : school or college of higher education.
maktab : elementary school.
malamat : rebuke and disgrace.
Malamati : a Sufi sect.
manqulat : traditional learning.
ma'qulat : science; rational discipline.
masnad : a large cushion; a throne.
masnavi : a form of long poetical composition.
maulvi : a learned Muslim teacher.
modikhana : a granary; provision-stores.

GLOSSARY

- mohur* : a gold coin.
mufti : expounder of Muhammadan law.
Muharram : the first month of the Muhammadan year; a Muslim festival held during the first ten days of the month of Muharram.
mu'jizat : evidentiary miracles; supernatural stories about Prophet Muhammad.
mullah : a teacher of Islamic doctrine.
muqaddams : village chiefs.
nam : literally, name; absorption in God's name.
namaz : formal Muslim prayer.
Nanakpanthi : followers of Guru Nanak.
Naqshbandi : a Sufi order.
nath : lord; an epithet for the followers of Gorakhnath.
Nayanmars : Tamil Shaivite mystics of medieval India.
pan : betel-leaf for chewing.
panda : a ritualist; priestly Brahman.
pandit : Brahmanical teacher of traditional learning.
panja : palm of the hand.
pardah : cover; veil worn by Muslim women to cover their faces from strangers.
pir : guide; Muslim religious leader.
pothi : a book.
Purana : generic name of a class of sacred literature of Brahmanical tradition dealing with the creation of the universe, human and divine beings, their duties, sacred places, divine and human genealogies, etc. There are eighteen classical and principal *Puranas* and eighteen secondary or *Upa-Puranas* which are of more recent origin.
puratan : ancient; old.
qaba : a kind of light gown; a long coat.
Qadiri : a Sufi order.
qalandar : a peripatetic Muslim devotee.
qazi : a Muslim judge.
Qur'an : the Holy Book of the Muslims.
raga : a musical form.
ragini : sub-division of a musical measure.
Rahim : merciful; a name to describe God.
Rajput : Sanskrit, Rajaputra; in medieval India the word came to be used for persons belonging to Kashatriya or royal houses.
rakh : pastureland.

GLOSSARY

Rama : name of one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu; also used for God.

Randhawa : name of a *jat* sub-caste.

rawal : an astrologer.

Rimpoche : Tibetan, great jewel; an honorific suffixed to the names of saints.

rishi : seer or sage.

sadhu : a recluse.

sahib : Lord; an honorific suffixed to the names of holy and noble personages.

salaam : salutation; the Muslim mode of greeting.

saligram : a small stone symbolic of one's adored deity.

sama' : practice of listening to devotional music.

samrath : powerful; capable; an epithet for God.

sangat : a congregation; a pious fellowship.

sant : a saint; a holy man; often used for devout mystics of medieval India.

serai : pilgrims' rest-house.

sewa : voluntary physical labour or service in the common cause of the community.

shabad : literally, word; *bani*, hymn or song.

shab-i-barat : a Jewish-Islamic festival held in Sha'ban, eighth lunar month of the Muslims.

shah : king; also used as an honorific for holy men.

shaikh : Muslim religious leader or scholar; the head of a Sufi order.

shakti : power; creative energy; a goddess.

shalwar : loose, baggy trousers.

sharadh : Sanskrit, *sradha*; ceremonial gifts or food, money, etc., offered in the name of one's ancestors.

Shari'at : Muslim canon based on the Qur'an and the Hadith.

shastra : the sacred scriptures of Hinduism.

Shivaratri : literally, Shiva's night; a Hindu religious festival in honour of god Shiva.

shudra : the fourth and lowest caste in the Brahmanical division of society.

siddha : a perfected saint; often used as a synonym for yogi or *nath*; one having supernormal psychic power or *siddhi*. In Guru Nanak's works, Siddha is a generic name or epithet for a class of ascetics of Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions.

silsilah : dynastic order of the Sufi teachers.

GLOSSARY

- simriti* : sacred tradition based on memory; a class of Brahmanical law books called *Dharamshastra*.
- sitar* : a musical instrument; a kind of Indian *veena*.
- slok* : a verse form; a couplet.
- sudi* : the light half of a lunar month.
- Sufi* : member of the order of ascetic Muslim mystics.
- Suhrawardi* : A Sufi order founded by Abu Hafs Umar Suhrawardi.
- tambur* : a Persian musical instrument akin to the Indian *sitar*.
- tapa* : literally, burning; austerity.
- tariqat* : the way of faith and devotion.
- ta'ziya* : a replica of the tomb of Husain, a martyred grandson of Prophet Muhammad, carried in processions during the festival of Muharram.
- tera* : thirteen; thine.
- tulsi* : name of a plant revered by the Hindus; *ocimum sanctum*.
- udasi* : homeless wandering; usually used in respect of Guru Nanak's extensive travels in pursuit of his mission.
- 'ulama* : Muslim theologians.
- Uppal* : name of a Kashatriya sub-caste.
- urs* : the death anniversary of a Muslim saint.
- vadi* : the dark half of a lunar month.
- vajrayana* : literally, adamant vehicle; one of the sects of Tantric Buddhism which flourished in early medieval India and became popular in Nepal and Tibet.
- var* : a form of poetical composition; ballad.
- Veda* : literally, knowledge; name of the earliest sacred books of Brahmanical tradition. The four Vedas are the *Rigveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Samaveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.
- Vishishtadvaita* : literally, special or qualified non-duality; name of a system of theistic Vedanta founded by the South Indian Vaishnavite teacher Ramanuja.
- Vishnu* : the most popular of the gods of Puranic Brahmanism; the supreme God in Bhagavatism or Vaishnaism, also called Vasudeva-Krishna.
- yajnopavita* : the sacred thread; the Brahmanical custom (*sanskara*) of performing sacrificial ritual at the time of a person's ceremonial adoption of the sacred thread.
- yavana* : from Ionian, meaning a Greek. The word also came to mean a barbarian. In the first millennium of the Christian era, Indian authors used this word to refer to foreigners and invaders.

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